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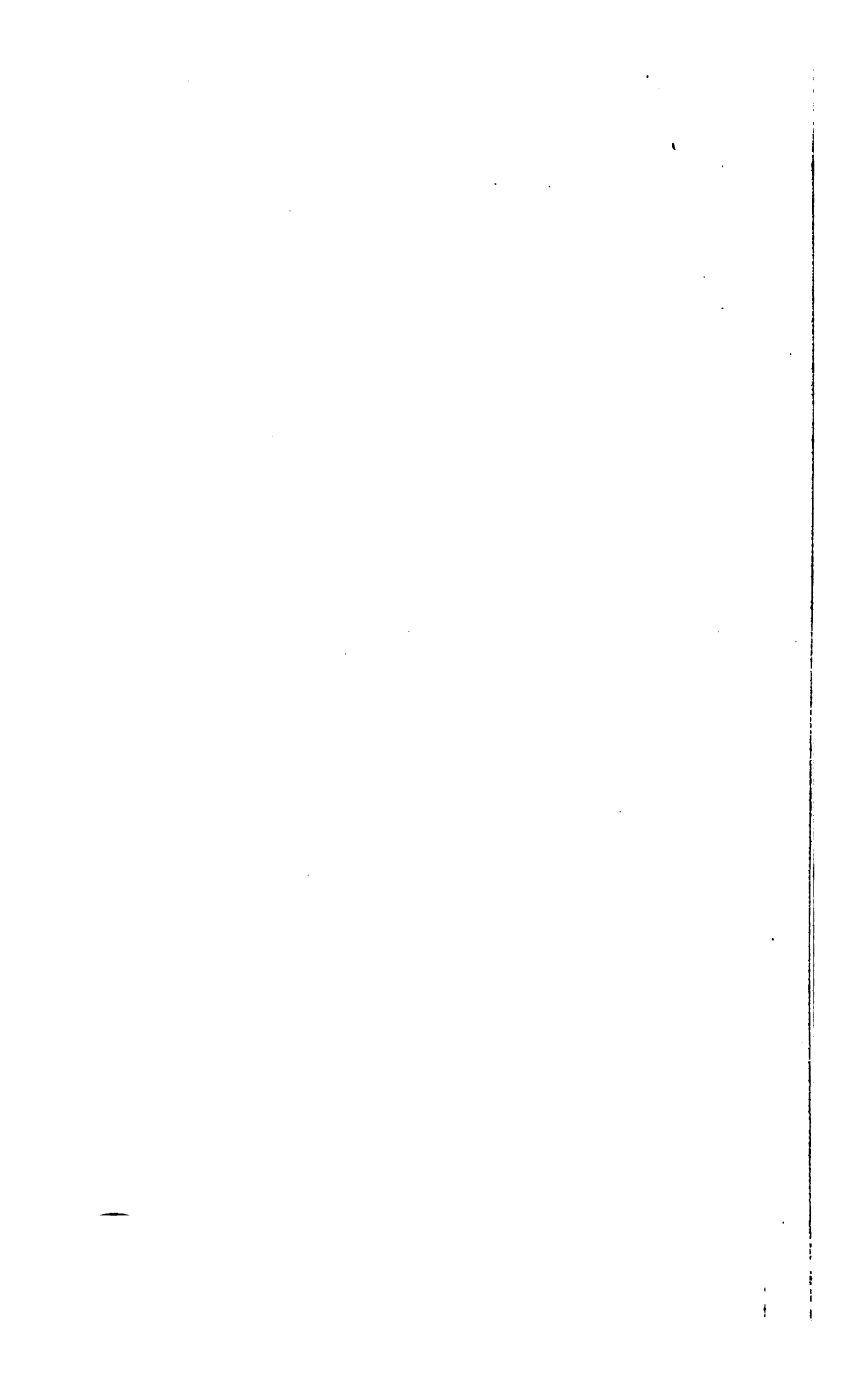
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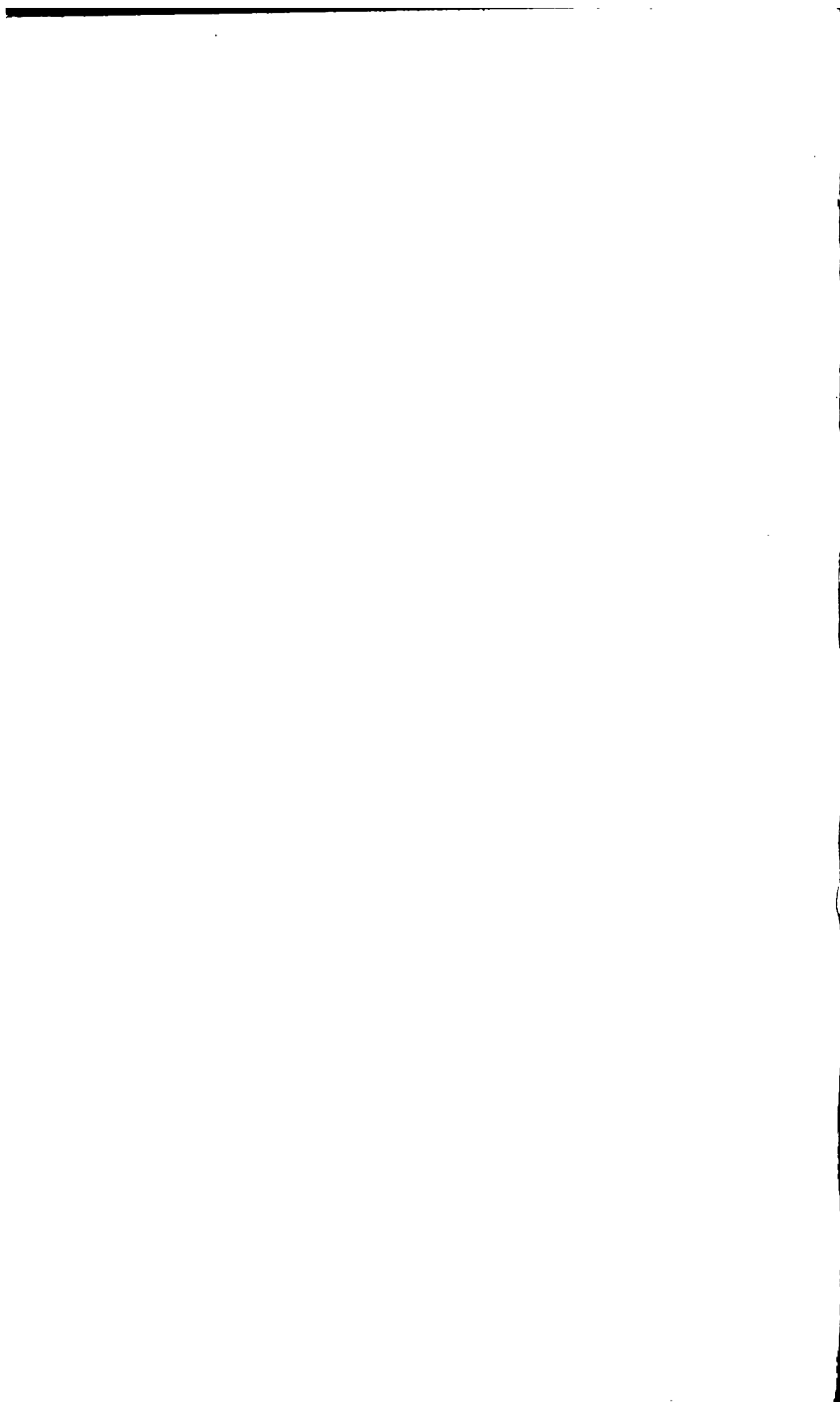
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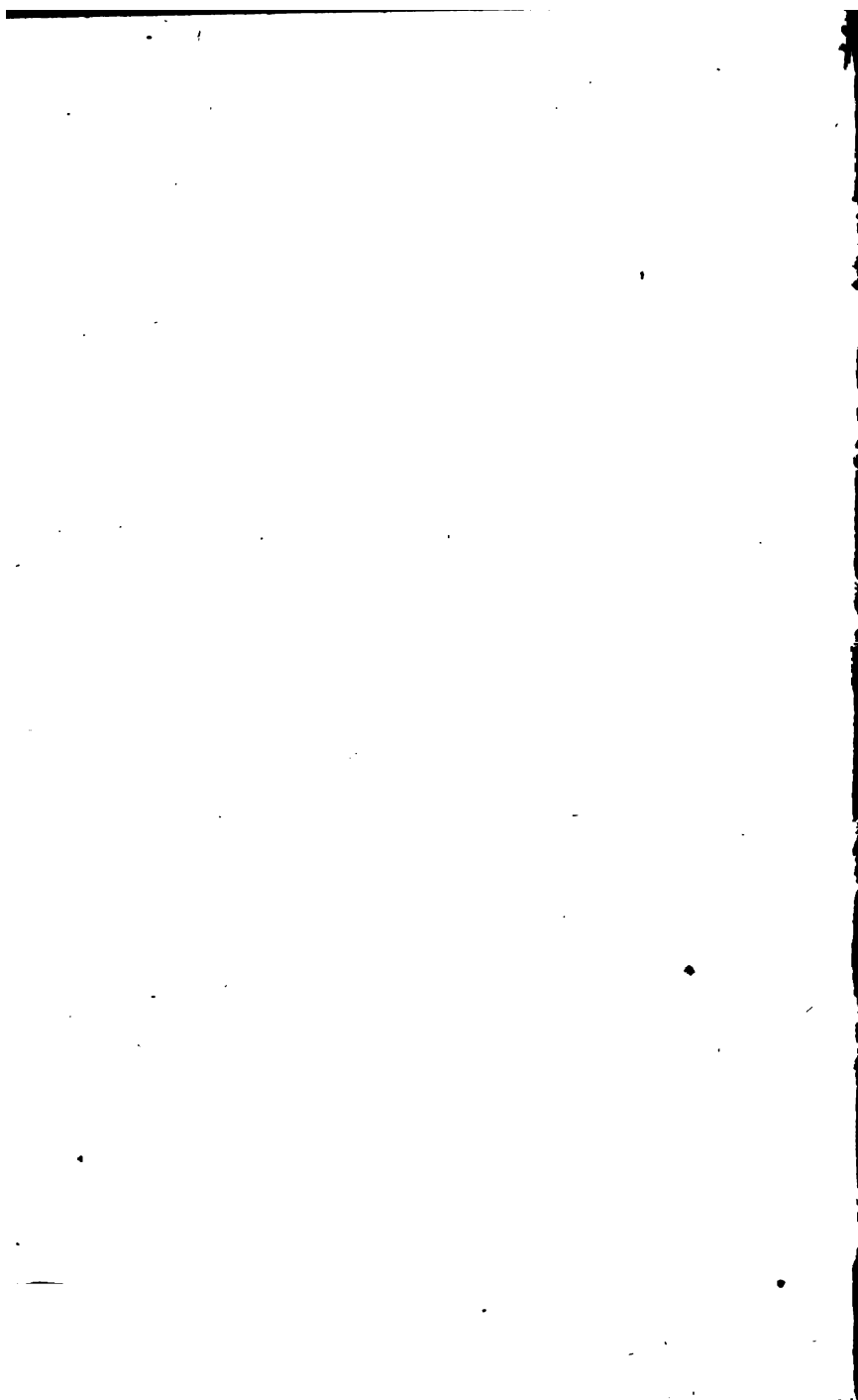
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THE HUGUENOT EXILES;
OR,
THE TIMES OF LOUIS XIV.

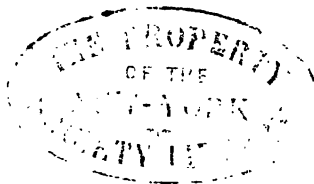
A Historical Novel.

"They have said, come and let us root them out, that they be no more a people."—*Psalm lxxxiii.*

"The hunting tribes of air and earth,
Respect the brethren of their birth.

Man only mars kind nature's plan,
And turns the fierce pursuit on man."

ROBERT.

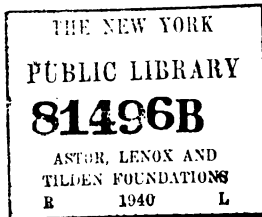


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P R E F A C E

FOR several years I have contemplated writing the following story ; and in that time I have gathered the historical materials on which it is founded. It is neither the crude outpouring of an unpracticed pen, nor the result of popular prejudice against the Romish Church ; on the contrary, my education had an opposite tendency ; and in early youth the pomp, ceremony, and *antiquity* of the Papal Church strongly interested my imagination.

But I became a reader of history, and as my acquaintance with the progress of the various nations of the world extended, the firm conviction came to me, that she who claims to be the universal Mother, aims at vailing the light from her disciples, reckless of their well-being, so long as the great Deity, the Church, is sustained.

Myself a descendant of a Huguenot refugee, whose romantic adventures are interwoven in the following pages, it seems a fitting tribute to the memory of my ancestor that his descendant shall lay this offering on the shrine of historical and religious fiction.

At this particular epoch, a work covering the whole ground of the Romish persecutions which preceded the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, may be acceptable to the public. My object has been to render it

popular by giving to its pages all the interest of a vividly told story, while it yet possesses the merit of dealing more in fact than in fiction.

In the scenes I have presented to the reader there is no exaggeration; on the contrary, I have found it necessary to soften the actual atrocities committed, as may be easily ascertained by those who will refer to the records of that terrible period. If the perusal of these pages induces the uninformed reader to learn something of the history and tendency of the Church of Rome, my chief object will be attained. Let him test the pretensions of the infallible Mother by the standard of *truth*, and learn how much they are worth. Let him see honor, good faith, and humanity trampled under foot by the self-styled successors of St. Peter—a series of the most corrupt and ambitious men that ever wielded authority. No royal race, imbecile and tyrannical as they usually have been, can compare with the Popes in crime; for no one family could have produced such a series of evil men as have arrogated to themselves the authority of God on earth, and reared a vast ecclesiastical despotism which is the curse of every country in which it has rule.

Claiming the title of the *only* Christian Church, it openly ignores the precepts of Christ; and the Saints, headed by the Virgin Mary, are the only deities worshiped; the sole use made of the Son of God being to show his dead image as an object of reverence to the ignorant.

There is, however, some fitness in this; as the wooden image, destitute of all vitality, is a suitable emblem of the dead faith, long since buried under superstition and priestcraft.



THE HUGUENOT EXILES.

CHAPTER I.

It was a smiling valley, with a background of mountain scenery of bold and picturesque aspect. At its base lay an ancient town famous for its Roman remains, and, in later times, for the fierce struggle for religious liberty of which it was the theatre. My story commences in the autumn of 1684, the period so fatal to the Huguenots in France; and its scene is the province of Languedoc, then groaning under the severe rule of the Duc de Noailles.

This nobleman is represented in history as a man not destitute of humanity, though, in obedience to the commands of the court, he certainly ruled the hapless Protestants with a rod of iron. His sole aim seems to have been to obey the commands of Louvains, the minister of Louis XIV., to convert the Reformers by any means. Under the system of lawless plunder known as the *dragonnade*, thousands returned to the Romish Church sooner than lose every thing for their religion.

The laws protecting the Huguenots were virtually annulled; there was neither safety for life nor property out of the pale of the Papal Church; no profession or trade was longer open to them; their just dues could not be collected from those who chose to evade them by becoming Papists; the priests were omnipotent; the Reformers were handed over by De Noailles to D'Aguesseau, the civil Intendant of Languedoc, for judgment; and every species of cruelty and injustice was permitted against them. The colleges and academies under their control had been abolished;

many of their churches destroyed, and the ministers forbidden to exercise their calling; several had been arrested and severely punished as the authors of sedition; and those who still continued in the exercise of their pastoral duties were compelled to preach in secluded places, with the constant fear of an attack from the dragoons upon the worshipers. Hence arose the appellation of Pastors of the Desert.

Several miles below the city of Nîmes stood an ancient chateau, which for generations had been in the possession of the Lefevre family—a name distinguished among the Huguenots from the times of Francis I., when James Lefevre, a distinguished doctor of theology, gave the first impulse in France to the religious reform which was so greatly needed.

On this spot the hills sloped gently toward the level land, and were covered with the long tendrils of the vine, now matted together in picturesque confusion, for the trim order that once prevailed among those green alleys was now no more. Desolation and ruin had swept over those once productive fields, and kindly nature, as is her wont, endeavored to veil the cruel ravages of man by putting forth luxuriance and beauty at her own sweet will.

On a slight elevation stood the chateau, a portion of it evidently of antique origin, to which additions had been made at different epochs. A circular tower stood strong, stern, and moss-grown, a type of the iron age in which it had been built; its walls were of immense thickness, into which long, narrow windows were pierced, that commanded a view of the whole panorama beneath.

It was easy to imagine the stalwart knights of the Middle Ages looking out from these loop-holes, and measuring, with practiced eye, the danger that approached their stronghold; while martial hearts beat high with the prospect of a fray to break the monotony of an existence to which mental culture lent no charm.

Poets have done all in their power to invest the age of knight-errantry with a glory and a beauty which I fancy



were far from being its attributes. Sir Tristram and Sir Lancelot sat in their grim abodes amidst wassail and uproar, or issued from them to carry desolation and dread among the "outside barbarians" who had incurred their displeasure. Such, prosaically, was the age of chivalry, though it lives in the imagination as a brilliant phase of existence, in which generosity and valor reigned supreme.

The additions to this tower seemed to have been made at long intervals of time, for each one displayed a different style of architecture, displeasing, perhaps, to a critical taste, but making altogether a most picturesque pile of building, covered with the moss of accumulated years and the clinging tendrils of the ivy. A few venerable trees which had been spared from the original forest growth, cast their sombre shadows over the old chateau, in keeping with its air of decayed grandeur; and a garden, laid out in the stiff and ungraceful fashion of the times of Louis le Grand, was in front of the mansion. In the centre of this was a rustic fountain, which cast its waters in a rudely-sculptured basin, now covered with the green moss of many years.

The latest addition to the chateau consisted of a suite of rooms opening upon the garden; these had evidently been fitted up with care, and with such a degree of elegance as a provincial proprietor would be likely to attain; but the floors, so carefully inlaid with woods of different colors, were now scratched, and in some places torn up; the hangings on the walls, of dressed leather, stamped with scroll-work in gold, were cut and defaced; while the furniture had evidently been ill-used and destroyed at the caprice of its occupants.

In the centre of the room stood a heavy table, elaborately carved, around which a party of a dozen soldiers were collected, with food and wine before them. They were mostly young men, with the gay, reckless expression belonging to their class; and they shouted, sang, or blasphemed, as suited the whim of the moment, without regard to the vicinity of the family, whose privacy they were authorized to invade

by the most unrighteous abuse of power ever exercised in a civilized country.

"I am the state," said that bloated embodiment of royal vanity, Louis XIV.; and to his ordinances must we look for a solution of the scene before us. M. Lefevre was one of the most unbending of that faithful band, many of whom suffered persecution, imprisonment, exile, and death, for the sake of the religion they professed. The country was filled with the King's soldiers, ostensibly to keep the Huguenots in order, but really to coerce them to return to the Romish Church; and the dragoons were quartered on the Protestant proprietors, with every degree of license permitted them which brutality might prompt them to exercise.

Complaint was useless; there was no redress save in recantation; and many preferred this to being impoverished and driven from their homes by the intrusion of the rude and ruthless soldiery. Not so M. Lefevre—a man of iron nerve, strict conscientiousness, and unbending firmness; he yielded not beneath the pressure of circumstances. He saw his lands laid waste, his home desecrated, his substance devoured by the creatures whose demands he was powerless to refuse, with that unwavering trust in the mercy of Him he worshiped, which led him to believe that He would yet bring light out of darkness, and reward those who remained faithful to the great cause of truth and spiritual freedom.

When he looked on those who were dependent on him with the distressing thought that ruin impended over them, he recalled the promise explicitly given, "Never yet have I seen the seed of the righteous begging their bread;" and with fervent faith he gave his beloved ones into the guardianship of that power which is mighty to save, as to destroy.

A wild chorus, which reverberated throughout the building, arose from the group around the table. Amidst the uproar, a door leading into the apartment was slowly opened, and the owner of the chateau stood in the aperture, calmly and sadly regarding the reckless faces, now flushed with

wine, whose presence beneath his roof had become a horror and a loathing to him.

M. Lefevre was verging toward his sixtieth year. His frame was powerful and firmly knit, with a certain air of rude grandeur which might have distinguished the Stoic philosophers. His features were strongly marked, and belonged to the noble type which sculptors choose when they wish to express the higher forms of intellectual and moral beauty. His hair, which was partially gray, had fallen from the temples and the upper portion of the head, leaving the regions of conscientiousness and firmness fully exposed; and one acquainted with human nature who looked upon that head, and that fearless face, must intuitively have felt that the spirit of the ancient martyrs animated the heart that throbbed within his frame—that with his last breath he would fearlessly proclaim, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”

While he stood calmly surveying the bacchanalian scene, the revelers caught sight of him, and one of them, rising from his seat, flourished his drinking-cup, and said,

“Ho! old graybeard! Hast come to test the quality of the wine you sent us? Never was meaner stuff offered to his majesty’s soldiers. Trash—absolute vinegar; and I propose that we seize you, and force you to swallow the whole of the vile compound.”

“I second that motion,” exclaimed another. “And I, and I, and I,” tumultuously resounded through the room, as the whole party arose.

The eye of the old man did not quail, nor a muscle shrink before the besotted crew. He knew that only by perfect self-command could he control them; only through moral power could he hope to escape the threatened violence. He advanced into the room with slow tread and composed mien; and glancing his clear, resolute eyes over the party, he spoke in a tone of quiet command which influenced them, they knew not why.

“Messieurs, resume your seats, I insist. I do not fear

your violence; for we have not so long dwelt beneath the same roof without coming to a better understanding with each other than your present conduct would seem to indicate. You have exhausted my cellar, and the wine I offer you to-day is such as the times afford. My purse is empty; my fields lie desolate; my home is scarcely a shelter to me. What, then, would you ask of a man so crushed and ruined as I am?"

"We do not *ask* you for any thing," replied the sergeant in command, a rough and coarse-looking man; "*we demand* better food, a more generous supply of drink, and hark ye, old fellow, we will have them, or make this old ruin as hot for you as that other place to which all heretics are bound. Your being ruined is no concern of ours; we are here by the orders of his most Christian Majesty, and it will be a dark day for you when you can no longer afford to supply our demands."

M. Lefevre listened almost with apathy. He had so long foreseen this crisis that when it arrived it found him prepared, through that desperate feeling that when an evil has reached its climax some change for the better must come. Whence or how this might be, he could not see, but the belief sustained him for the time. He said,

"I came hither but now to announce to you that my last franc is expended. Credit I can not obtain, for the means of repaying will never be mine. The chateau you must occupy, if it seems good to you to do so, but your wants I no longer possess the means of supplying. The end for which you were placed here is accomplished; the ruin of Huguenot proprietors was the aim of the court; mine is completed; go to D'Aguesseau or his priestly minion and tell them so, and they may remove you to better quarters, if their malice against me is yet sated."

While he thus spoke another actor was added to the scene. A figure clad in dark, flowing robes, entered noiselessly through the open door leading into the garden. He raised his hand to impose silence on those that saw him,

and listened with an air of scornful bitterness to the words of M. Lefevre.

The person of the monk was tall and well formed, and his features were strongly expressive of a sagacious and searching intellect. His eyes were dark and deep set, and seemed to glow with the fires of that Tartarus he firmly believed would be the future abode of those benighted beings who so madly severed themselves from the Mother Church.

A reckless fanatic, burning with the united zeal of Loyola, and of him through whose agency that terrible engine of cruelty, the Inquisition, was established, Father Antoine seemed as an avenging spirit to the unfortunate Huguenots who fell within his ruthless power. The tones of his voice were clear, ringing, and hard, as he replied to the words of the host.

"Ruined, while your acres still remain to you, Victor Lefevre? While this house, with its valuable furniture and pictures of price, is yet yours? Go to—what meaneth such babble?"

M. Lefevre turned and surveyed him with the same unmoved expression he had hitherto worn. He replied,

"The pictures, save one, are all gone. The plate belonging to my family has, in like manner, been sacrificed to supply the demands of the soldiers sent to consume my substance. The furniture has been destroyed by them; nothing is left save the lands that are now an unproductive wilderness, and the old chateau in which we stand. Am I not right, then, in saying that I am ruined—that nothing remains to my family but destitution, perhaps death?"

"The last must come to us all, but if it findeth us prepared, and in good odor with the only true Church on earth, it matters not," said the monk, devoutly crossing himself. "What are earthly tribulations if they lead to everlasting glory? Does not God try his chosen ones? and his Church but follows his sacred example in bringing back her strayed and benighted children, even as through a furnace of fire. Oh! stiff-necked and contumacious man, is not your heart

yet bowed before the will of the Most High God? Would he send these tribulations to you but for your own good? and yet you persist in rejecting his efforts to restore you to his holy communion, purified from your errors through suffering."

"It has been said, 'Ask of me bread, and I will not give you a stone,'" said M. Lefevre, with an accent of bitterness. "How does this comport with the tender mercies extended to me and my brethren by such as you who dare to call yourselves the ministers of Christ? By men who daily offer prayers at the shrine of a meek and tender woman, and yet commit acts of oppression and cruelty at which humanity shudders. No—in the persecutions that follow those of my faith I recognize, not the hand of God, but the vengeful blows of human hate."

At these daring words a murmur arose from the soldiers, and they made a movement toward the speaker, but it was stayed by the priest.

"No, my children, no. Leave him to me. I have coped with more rebellious spirits than this, and came off triumphant. I would have no violence used toward the outer man. I work upon the subtle cords that move men's souls. This contumacious heretic thinks we are done with him when his worldly coffers are exhausted, when that is but the commencement of the end."

"Which end will never be attained, so far as I am concerned," said Lefevre, sorrowfully but firmly. "All that is now left me is my religion; and if I could be wrought on to relinquish that, there would be nothing left for me but to do as Job's advisers bade him, 'Curse God, and die.'"

"The God of the heretic may very well reduce his followers to that extremity," sneered Father Antoine. "But, in the mean time, the wants of these sons of holy Mother Church must be provided for. So long as one acre of land is held in your name, or one article of value left to you that can be made available, you are not freed from the requirements of the Intendant."

Lefevre sighed heavily. He said,

"Such personal property as possessed any value has already been sacrificed. The estate I hold descends to my son by a law of the land, which prevents me from alienating it. Where, then, shall I turn for means to bear this unrighteous imposition, which compels me to support a reckless and wasteful band of soldiers, whose presence profanes the sacredness of my hearth, destroys my resources, and reduces me to the position of an inferior in the halls of my fathers?"

A malignant smile gleamed on the monk's lip.

"Methinks you are over-free spoken, M. Lefevre. The king does not permit such language to be used toward him without bringing the offender to an account for it. We will, however, leave that for future consideration. In the mean time, I will inform you that your lands can be readily alienated from your son, provided they are purchased by a true Catholic. The rights of heretics are not very scrupulously guarded by the court, and I know a man who will gladly make the purchase, and take all future risks."

An expression of acute pain passed over the features of M. Lefevre, for this inheritance had descended from father to son for many generations, and he clung to the hope of bequeathing it to his children with that fond tenacity which weds the heart, as with bands of iron, to the spot on which we first drew breath, around which all the tender and pure memories of childhood and youth are entwined. He said,

"The services of my son to the state will surely entitle his claim to some respect. He who sheds his blood to sustain the honor of his country should not have his private rights thus invaded."

"Is he not also a renegade from the true faith? Or has he abjured the absurd errors in which he was educated, since he has seen more of the world in which we live? In the latter case some consideration may be shown."

"Had he done so, he would be no son of mine," replied the father, with stern emphasis. "No. Colonel Lefevre is a follower of that great and noble man who proclaimed

aloud the doctrine that by faith we live; and he would sooner have his tongue torn from his mouth than suffer it to belie the belief of his heart, though all his worldly possessions, ay, life itself, were at stake." And as he thus proclaimed his confidence in the principles of his son, the father's form grew more erect, his sad eyes gleamed with newly-awakened fire.

"Then are his claims reckoned as naught," was the cool rejoinder. "I am empowered to act for the party I referred to, and that was the business which drew me hither to-day. I am quite aware that your resources are exhausted; and from the sale of your lands alone can you raise the means to obey the commands of the government with reference to these men. You are aware of the consequences if you refuse to comply with them to the utmost of your ability."

"I am; and I have already said that I can do no more. The lands I will not alienate from my son. You can but imprison—torture me, as you have many others; but I can bear it. Any suffering to myself is better than unfaithfulness to the claims of another. The right is not mine to part from this estate, and I will not act as if it were."

"An obstinate spirit of independence," sneered the priest; "but we will find means to break it yet. Learn from me, M. Lefevre, that I will cause such stores to be brought hither as are needful for the support of these faithful servants of the Church until such time as I consider the old chateau and its dependencies as paid for; then the new proprietor can claim his own; and should your remonstrances be too loud, effectual means will be taken to silence them."

M. Lefevre bowed calmly and proudly.

"I am aware that in your code 'might is right.' I can only leave myself in the hands of the Most High God, who will not permit such unrighteousness to prevail, save to promote some noble end, veiled in the mystery and darkness of the future. If it be His will that I shall be thus hardly dealt with, I can submit; but by no voluntary act of my own will I disinherit my son."

As he finished speaking, he turned and slowly retraced his steps toward the door by which he had entered. Before closing it, he again faced the group he had just left, and said, with a faint touch of emotion quivering in his voice,

"I came hither to announce to you that death is beneath the roof which was so lately ringing with your bacchanalian mirth. I simply inform you of this fact, with scarcely a hope that *my* griefs will be respected; but with the belief that common humanity may prevent you from insulting the great Conqueror, before whom we must all one day succumb."

He closed the door abruptly, and his slow steps were heard retreating toward that portion of the building occupied by his family, while the party he had left remained in silent surprise at the announcement.

At length the priest asked of the sergeant,

"Who has been ill, Pierre? Is it the mother, or the daughter?"

"The old lady, to be sure; but I had no idea she would go this soon."

"Did he say that she is already dead? I must be on the alert, and find out what disposition is made of the remains. Be careful, my son, and report faithfully to me all that transpires. I shall see you again to-morrow; in the mean time, you need not be particular as to the grief of a heretic. Since he outrages our sense of religion, you may with impunity outrage him in any other way you please. Benedicite, my sons;" and with this blessing, and a sign of the cross, the priest stalked away.

The men looked at each other, and one of them said,

"If the old man don't believe in the mass, he's got a heart in his body, and I don't feel like hurting it any more than it's hurt now; so *I* shan't make any more noise, boys."

"Nor I," said another; "because the captain might not like it when he hears of it; for he's mighty sweet toward the girl; and if she complains of our noise at such a time, it might go hard with some of us. Father Antoine would not step in, I fancy, to shelter us from his anger."

"Pooh! the captain wouldn't dare to reprimand us for any excess in a Protestant house," said Pierre. "He would be suspected of leaning toward them himself, if the priest heard of it; and we may safely finish our carouse if we choose. For my part, I think we may as well sing songs here as listen to puritanical chants from the dead room, reminding us all the time that another of the rebellious crew has paid the penalty of her heresies and gone to the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. Let us be merry, I say;" and he burst into a drinking song, in the chorus of which the whole party joined, except the one who had manifested a rude touch of sympathy for the bereaved husband.

As the hours sped on their mirth grew more uproarious, until the old walls rang with their wild revelry; and sadly did it contrast with the mournful scene exhibited in another portion of the building.

CHAPTER II.

THE modern portion of the chateau had been taken possession of by the dragoons, and the family without ceremony required to relinquish their own apartments and retire to the more ancient part of the structure.

In his retreat, M. Lefevre passed through several deserted rooms, entirely denuded of their furniture; for his enforced guests appropriated or destroyed every thing within their reach; and the empty walls reverberated his hopeless steps with an echo that fell heavily upon his heart. He at length approached the tower, and paused a moment at the door to summon courage to enter; for the sounds of stifled weeping came from within, and he knew that to the heart-grief there he could offer no further consolation than the hope of a future reunion afforded.

At length he softly turned the bolt, and stood silently surveying the scene presented by the room. It was of octagon form, and the apertures in the wall which served as windows, had been, at some period long past, filled with stained glass, representing the principal events in the life of Christ. Before the Reformation this room had been used as an oratory, and several rude engravings still adorned the walls. The treatment of their subjects was not repulsive to the purer tastes of the Huguenots, and when other pictures had been removed, these had been suffered to remain. As objects of art they were worthless, or they would already have shared the fate of those which were valuable as copies from distinguished masters.

Among these pictures was a single portrait which had been taken from its frame, and rested on a chair. It represented the head of a lovely woman, emerging from purple and rose-tinted clouds, which harmonized with the trans-

parent delicacy of her complexion. It was not an ideal head, for there was little resemblance to the Grecian type which artists multiply until it becomes wearisome. This was evidently the portrait of a noble, true, and gentle woman, with intellect, principle, and moral courage beaming from the features of regal mould and most attractive symmetry.

In the expression of this head there was something pure, devotional, *seraphic* to those who comprehend that the higher intelligences which surround the throne of the Eternal must have a nobler and truer type than the mere flesh and blood beauty which artists usually assign them. This woman looked like she might be the mother of martyrs, or breathe out her own spirit in defense of what she believed to be right, rejoicing that her example might enable others to remain steadfast in the path of truth.

In contrast with the Mother of Christ in a holy family that hung above it, the doll-like person of Mary seemed a caricature of what her high destiny must have made her. In delineating the Virgin, the aim of the artist seems ever to be, to make a beautiful and refined-looking woman, without reference to the higher nobility that nature must have stamped upon that face which bent above the infant Christ and claimed the Redeemer of the world as her son.

The hair of the portrait was rolled away from the temples, and hung in golden waves around the majestic face, and the eyes, of a dark, clear gray, beamed with a mild and human lustre, that attracted the gaze as to the face of a friend.

The apartment was nearly destitute of furniture; a few antique chairs, covered with faded damask, a table, bed, and couch, comprised the whole. The last was drawn into the centre of the room, and on it lay the pale and rigid form of the original of the portrait we have described. Though time had marred the youthful beauty of the features, there was the same magnificence of outline, and the same sweet benignity of expression characterized them even in death.

Kneeling beside the couch was a youthful female with

bowed head and clasped hands, which quivered in every muscle with the intense emotion that shook her frame. She was unconscious of the approach of her father until he stood beside her and spoke.

"My child, control this outburst of grief; it will only unfit you for all that is to come. I thank our Father in heaven that he has taken our suffering angel to dwell with Him. Never has His mercy been more signally shown than in so doing, for she is spared the expulsion from her own home which now awaits us."

At the sound of his voice the young girl raised her head and put aside the masses of dark brown hair that had fallen over her face. Though pallid from fatigue and mental anguish, it bore sufficient resemblance to the portrait to reveal the same traits of character impressed on that; and with a power of self-control remarkable in one of her years, she arose, wiped away her tears, and said,

"Pardon this indulgence, dear father; it was my selfish grief making itself heard in your absence. I feel and know that my beloved mother has gone to her reward; and were the power mine, I would not summon her back to share our dreary and hopeless existence. But human anguish must find expression once; henceforth I can nerve my soul to bear all in silence."

"My daughter, you inherit *her* spirit, and I know you can bear to the end whatever fate Heaven may send. I thank Him, in whose name we suffer, that it is thus, for I sadly fear your lot will be one of peculiar trial. We live in times of tribulation to the steadfast and conscientious Christian; and we know not what temptations may come to us. Here, beside the remains of your mother, let us renew our pledge to continue true to the end in spite of every lure held out by the evil one."

"I accept the pledge, father. I promise that I will remain steadfast to the faith imbibed from the pure heart of my sainted mother, even if death should prove the penalty of my constancy;" and a pale rose-tint gleamed on the white

cheeks of the young enthusiast as she grasped his hand and held it above the silent sleeper, whose calm lips seemed to smile on them from the repose of death.

After a pause of deep emotion, M. Lefevre said,

"My daughter, you owe the fulfillment of this pledge not alone to the parent you loved, but to the martyred heroes of your lineage, who sealed their faith with their blood. Your grandfather perished in the massacre of St. Bartholomew's eve; my uncle on the hapless field of Jarnac; and since the days of Francis I. there has not been wanting a man of our race to proclaim that vital truth of our religion, fearlessly put forth by Luther at a later day, that by faith we live. Let us pray, my child, that strength may be granted us not to shrink from the path trodden by those noble men."

With their hands still clasped the two knelt beside the couch, and the fervent tones of the bereaved husband arose in solemn cadence to the throne of mercy in a prayer of such simple and sublime eloquence as is alone inspired by earnest piety and the thrilling belief that the pleadings of human anguish are hearkened to by the ear of Deity itself; that from His compassionate heart a divine ray of consolation will penetrate the gloom, bringing with it renewed resignation and hope.

Mingled with this touching aspiration for strength in this hour of great trial, came the wild cadence of a drinking song from the reckless revelers beneath his roof. His daughter shuddered at this desecration, and a deathlike paleness overspread her features. M. Lefevre arose from his kneeling posture, and raising his clasped hands to heaven, fervently repeated the sublime words of Christ in his death agony, "'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' My daughter, I would have spared you this, and I appealed to the humanity which I believed was not utterly extinct in their breasts. They do not choose to respect our sorrow, and we must bear it as we best may."

"Dear father, it was of you I thought, for you I suffered.

This last insult I can bear, since their rude revelry can no longer disturb the repose of our beloved one."

"No—thank the ever-merciful One—she is safe amidst the angels, never more to feel the pangs of mortal anguish! Oh! for what earthly possession would I in this hour exchange my living and earnest faith in the promises made by God? in those consoling and heavenly assurances so cruelly and craftily withheld from the Catholic world by the priests, who seek to make a barter of the mercy of Heaven? Monstrous and appalling pretension! How dare any man arrogate to himself a power so omnipotent! It seems a miracle that fire from heaven does not descend and smite the priest in his sin, as it did him of old who laid profane hands on the ark of the covenant."

A slight noise was heard in a portion of the wall that, to all appearance, was as solid as the remainder, and the two turned toward it with evident expectation. The young girl whispered—

"It is Claude. He alone is acquainted with the secret of the spring."

As she spoke the panel slid slowly back, and, in place of the friendly face they had expected to see, appeared the dark form of Father Antoine, who entered, and was followed by another priest bearing the sacred emblems of his calling with which the dying are prepared for the final change. They were followed by two boys clad in the flowing white robes of acolytes, who swung lighted censers in their hands.

M. Lefevre confronted him, and sternly asked,

"What does this intrusion mean?"

The priest approached the couch as he answered,

"As I left the chateau I fortunately met the brother here bearing the emblems from a death-bed, from which he has just returned, and I have brought him hither. I have brought you holy power to purify heretical stains, and charge you, as you value earthly safety or heavenly salvation, not to refuse its ministrations."

Lefevre pointed to the body of his wife, and solemnly said,

"Behold, the subtle cord is loosed, and the released spirit is with its Creator and Master! The Holy Scriptures say, 'As the tree falleth, so it must lie,' and your ministrations can now be of no avail."

"All the worse for her and for you that such neglect of God's holy ordinances has been permitted," replied the priest, sternly.

"If I recognized them as being of God, I would not deny their efficacy," was the firm response. "The simple faith taught by Christ enjoins no such rites, and I therefore should refuse them, even if my lost one was in a condition to be affected by them in any manner. Where death has set his solemn seal, the efforts of man cease to be availing."

"Not so; holy Mother Church teaches us that the sinful soul may by masses be rescued from the jaws of destruction. Prayers may be said for the repose of the soul, where any doubt exists as to the heresy of the departed."

"And why such doubts of the sincerity of her who lies before us in professing the faith to which she clung to the last?"

"They are many, and of serious import. She belonged by birth to a family of strict belief in the true Church. She was carefully trained in its mysteries, and only abjured her faith at the instigation of her wild passion for yourself. In uniting her fate with that of a heretic, she relinquished family ties, the religion of her fathers, and placed herself under the influence of a mind steeped like yours in the fatal errors of that sinful man who brought disunion in God's Church, rent the holy of holies in twain, and desecrated the faith in which he had been reared. Verily, he is now enjoying his reward."

"Truly, yes. And that reward we are assured is 'greater than it hath entered into the heart of man to conceive.' I assure you that she who lies before us was as truly the

follower of Luther as any who claim to be such. Her religious faith never wavered from the first hour in which the Scriptures were made the rule of her pure and blameless life. Most happily did her career illustrate the influence of those sacred writings on her daily conduct. Never, even among the canonized saints to whom you offer worship, lived a woman with a truer and purer sense of right—a more living faith in the great founder of our religion. She would sooner have perished than deny the only Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who expiated our sins upon the cross. Think you that with this knowledge I, her husband, will permit a doubt to soil her memory by suffering you to perform those pious mummeries which we, of a purer belief, have abjured? No. Let the result to myself be what it may, these sacred relics shall not thus be insulted."

"M. Lefevre," replied the monk, with an expression of vivid and concentrated malice on his features, "are you aware that I have power to consign you to prison—to the torture—ay, to the stake itself, for such words as you have uttered but now?"

"Such a result has long been familiar to my thoughts, and I am aware that you have labored to bring it about. Many men, stronger in intellect, higher in position, and every way more worthy than I, have become victims to your cruel power. If they found strength to suffer in the cause of their Master, I will not shrink from uttering my convictions from a craven fear that I may share their fate. God has at least bestowed on me moral courage to endure all that man may have power to inflict; and I will bear witness to the great truths he has written on my heart in characters of such burning fire as prompt me forever to proclaim aloud the infinite truth and mercy that is cruelly made a matter of barter by those claiming to be his representatives on earth. I tell you, priest, that so far from making such as you the ministers of his abounding grace, he closes your hearts even to a perception of his true nature. Your own acts bear witness to this, for things are done by you in the

name of Christ which cause his wounds to bleed afresh, his compassionate heart to throb with anguish great as that borne by him in the garden of Gethsemane, and yet you dare to call yourselves his representatives on earth! Here, amidst the ruins of hope and happiness, with my dead lying before me, I shrink not from the utterance of the truth. It is of God; therefore will it eventually triumph, even though the feeble voice of such as I alone may be left to bear witness to its eternal progress. By the slow accretion of innumerable years were formed lands that now teem with life and beauty; and thus, by almost imperceptible degrees, will the Eternal build up that pure faith which brings his creatures into communion with himself, without the intervention of a sinful and erring creature, subject to the infirmities of humanity. Christ taught us to say Our Father; and will a father refuse to hearken to the supplications of his children, unless they are presented to him through the intercession of the Virgin and the saints? The spirit of God beareth witness within me that it is not so, and I hearken joyfully to its teachings. 'Unto the godly there ariseth up light in the darkness, for He is merciful, loving, and righteous.' I trust in those attributes; I clasp his promises to my heart, and they strengthen me to walk in the path that lies before me, even though it should lead through the fiery furnace."

"Verily, there is no need for that ordeal on earth, when we know that the wanderings of the heretics must end there in that which is to come," replied the monk, with sarcastic emphasis. "I have listened to your ravings, M. Lefevre, and if I did not regard them as the outbreak of temporary insanity, I should feel bound to report them where they must produce serious results to you and yours. But, for the sake of the young daughter, who may be won back to the true fold, I forbear; through her influence the parent stem may yet be bent beneath the light yoke the holy Mother Church imposes on her children."

Thus appealed to, Irene raised her bowed head, and a

faint hue of crimson flitted over her cheek, to fade instantly away as she caught the cold gleam of that bright black eye fixed on her. She simply said,

"I, too, am a Protestant. Behold the emblems of our faith, which my hand placed upon the breast of my dead mother;" and she passed her fingers over a small bouquet of flowers, composed of roses, wheat, and heart's-ease, that lay among the white folds over the heart of the departed.

The lips of the priest curled scornfully.

"The rose is the emblem of secrecy; and it is well that so false a faith as thine should claim it as its appropriate symbol: only in darkness and mystery can the curse of heresy ever flourish."

"You seem to forget that the rose was also the emblem of the early Christians, when compelled, by pagan persecution, to hide in caves and deserts to practice the rites of their religion," said Lefevre. "We, in a more enlightened age, are forced to the same course by those calling themselves the lawful successors of that band of holy men. But that which is sown in darkness shall spring up to the light of day and bear a thousand-fold, as the wheat which lieth in the ground for a season and in due time bringeth forth its increase; for it is written, 'Not by bread alone shall man live, but by faith.' Those delicate purple blossoms, with their gleams of golden glory, carry to the heart of the faithful the assurance that the blood of the Redeemer was not shed in vain; that a brighter hope radiates from the hill of Calvary, which priestcraft may not dim—which all the united evil of the world shall not quench. Behold! now my daughter placed these here; she is my child; mine in heart, in faith, in firmness to endure all the persecutions men may be permitted to inflict, without swerving from that faith which has become a portion of her very being."

Irene arose and stood beside the noble figure of her father. Her heart beat more quickly than usual, for, however firm in her faith, she could not altogether stifle her fears for him who so fearlessly proclaimed his earnest convictions

of truth and right. She said nothing; but the expressive gesture with which she clung to him was more eloquent than words. A lowering frown gathered on the brow of the priest, and he said,

"Behold the seeds of rebellion planted by the heretical father springing to the light and bearing fruit meet for such sowing. Do you remember on what occasion it is commanded, 'Compel them to enter in?' The feast is spread, the invitation to come given forth, and those who stubbornly close their hearts to its persuasive influence must be made to do that which is right for them. The young shall no longer be left under evil influences—they are easily swayed; they can be brought back to the true faith by persuasion and instructions. Even that holy woman who now sways the counsels of the great Louis was, in youth, so far misled as to be a strong follower of Calvin; but the blessing of God followed the teachings of holy Mother Church, when she was placed entirely under its influence, and she became what she now is—a glory to her faith, a blessing to the nation over whose ruler she maintains so salutary an influence."

"You allude to that renegade to the faith of her fathers, François D'Aubigné, now called Marquise de Maintenon, and believed to be the wife of the king? Should *my* daughter emulate her treachery, I could be the Virginius of my household, and shed her innocent blood before so great a sin was laid upon her soul."

Irene trembled at these daring words, and Father Antoine said,

"Beware of uttering treason against the Queen of France; not the less in station and power that she wears not the crown openly. Methinks I need not seek the means to bring destruction on you, Lefevre, when your own words furnish charges of such fatal import against you."

"Oh, heed them not!" supplicated the pleading voice of the young girl. "His heart is sore with suffering, his soul is wrung with bereavement. In such an hour the utterances

of the spirit should not be hearkened to. Be merciful, I conjure you, in the name of the One God whom we all supplicate for mercy! I ask forbearance toward an old man nearly maddened by grief."

Her father turned his eyes on her with an expression of calm reproof, and he sorrowfully said,

"Shrinkest thou so soon from the pledge so recently given? Yet it is natural—you are but a tender, suffering woman, who deprecates the approach of evil to those she loves; and I do not forget that Peter denied even his Lord when human fear assailed him. No, I am not maddened by anguish; therefore put forward no such plea for me, for my heart is strong and well-nerved for the contest before me. I have an angel in heaven who breathes into my soul a subtle spirit of courage and hope. It tells me that mine is the true mission, Heaven-directed and God-inspired. The enthusiasm of the dead martyrs of all time seems transfused into my soul, and forces me to speak the truth, the whole truth, to those fanatics who cause the angels of God to veil their faces in mourning over the cruel deeds done in the name of their Master."

There was a quiet yet fervent sincerity in his manner and in the tones of his voice which savored neither of madness nor fear; and as the priest looked on him, he felt that in a strong and resolute soul a deeper sense of injustice, a stronger, sterner power of resistance had been aroused toward that great ecclesiastical Moloch which was the idol of his own affections, and the source of his power to torture, to kill in this world, to condemn to everlasting destruction in that which is to come. He hated Lefevre because of the natural antagonism between them, but most for his consistent opposition to the faith he firmly believed to be the only true one; but at this crisis he felt the impolicy of further exasperating his victim. He would play with him as the cat tantalizes her helpless prey before destroying it, and with the same certainty that at any moment he could crush him in his iron grasp. He said,

"You deny to me, and those of my class, all mercy; but I will prove to you that the charge is unfounded. I refuse to listen to the insults you have heaped on that Holy of Holies, the true Church of God, though I might work your ruin by reporting them in higher quarters. For the present I refrain from using the authority I possess to claim the custody of your daughter, and place her in the charge of her mother's family, who will see that her young mind is brought back to a perception of the truth. This power I have, but I defer its exertion until you are in a calmer frame of mind, and can view the separation from your child as an act of mercy and benevolence toward her, for it is the first step toward bringing her back to the true fold."

M. Lefevre regarded him with an expression of incredulous contempt.

"So you would act the part of the wolf in sheep's clothing? Well, be it so. Let me keep my child for the present. When I can no longer protect her, when the hour arrives in which it will be best for me to be alone in the world, I shall feel thankful that in times such as these a safe asylum with her own kindred is afforded my poor girl, where she can remain until a brighter day dawns on my persecuted fellow-Christians. I can trust to her principles, to the knowledge of truth and right already implanted in her mind, which gives me the assurance that she will not waver in her faith. And now depart, I pray you, that we may be alone with the relics of our lost one. Your ministrations can now be of no avail, even if we believed in their efficacy."

The priest had gained all for which he hoped in intruding in the tower—a refusal of the last rites to the dead, which afforded him a pretext for the subsequent course he intended to pursue toward M. Lefevre. He hated him without other cause than that which springs up between a frank courageous temper and a subtle spirit which embodied the true soul of Jesuitism. At a sign from him, the attendant

priest withdrew, followed by the acolytes, and he paused to say to Irene,

"Think of what I have said, daughter, and harden not your heart to the convictions of conscience. Reflect on the wide-spreading mercy of that institution which seeks to gather in its sacred protection all who have strayed from its blessed truths. I hope great things for you in the future, for brilliant shall be the reward of those who turn from falsehood to the true fount of grace and mercy."

Irene bowed her head, and her tears fell like rain over her pale features, but she made no reply, and with his usual gesture of benediction, though he uttered no audible blessing, Father Antoine departed, and closed the opening after him.

Lefevre gazed sternly on the spot, and after a pause said,

"I should have felt assured that the secret entrance was known to those who make it their business to learn every thing. We have doubtless been spied on at all hours, and our most secret thoughts made known to those ruthless myrmidons of a power that fills the Christian world with dread and mysterious fear. O Lord! Lord! that such things should be done in thy name! My daughter, wipe away your tears—this is no time to weep. If the baptism of tears could arouse the latent energies of the soul, I would say, shed them freely; but they only take from you the strength that is needed to evade the subtle craft of him who has just left us."

"Oh, my dear father, can he, dares he tear me from your side?" asked Irene, struggling to repress the emotions that would have vent. "Any evil but that I can bear."

"My daughter, we must nerve ourselves to bear all that Heaven may send. The man who has just left us wields a power before which that of the mightiest autocrat sinks into insignificance; for he claims the right to rule not only the temporal affairs of men, but to trammel the immortal spirit, and say, 'This thou shalt think and believe, in spite of the teachings of thy own internal convictions of right

and wrong.' The dawnings of light are stifled at the command of the Church of Rome, and her children forced to become blind followers of those who dare to propagate error for truth, in the name of the Majesty of Heaven. Doubtless Antoine de Chalus has the power to remove you from my protection; and, in spite of his pretended forbearance, he will speedily use it. But we must seek the means to baffle him; and when Claude Chastain comes, we will determine what is best to be done in this desperate crisis of our affairs. Pray for strength, my child, and it will be given to you; no feminine weakness must now unnerve you, or the victory will be gained by our foes. I know that we must be separated, Irene; but if I can save you from the ordeal of a residence with the bigoted family of your mother, I will do so. I must obtain another protector for you, whose right may be regarded as more sacred than that of a parent, even by these sacrilegious emissaries of unrighteous power."

A faint blush tinged the cheek of the young girl, and she looked inquiringly at her father. He at once replied to the look:

"It is my purpose to bestow your hand on him to whom you have been long betrothed; but it must be done in secret, and the tie be known only to ourselves, until it becomes necessary to divulge it, that you may claim the protection of your husband. It would be most disastrous to Chastain's prospects to have it known that he has linked his fate with that of the daughter of a ruined Huguenot."

"Then let me risk every thing, sooner than bring misfortune to the home of him who loves me well enough to bear it for my sake. Let us go forth from our home, father, and seek a new abiding place in some far land, where the spirit of God broods lovingly over the solitudes his hand created; where the cruel spirit of human persecution may not pursue us because we seek to offer him a pure worship. I can better bear to leave all I have loved, than to become a blight upon the fortunes of the generous heart that would

receive me in the belief that he gained in me a precious boon from Heaven."

"Alas! my child, whither should we turn our steps? Persecuted to the death at home, the avenues of escape are sedulously closed upon us. The frontiers are guarded, and it is at the risk of life itself, or condemnation to the galleys, that we must make the attempt. Hemmed in on every side, I see no resource but, like the hunted stag, to turn at bay and defy them. I have made up my mind to my future course; the remnant of my days belongs to God and my faith. I will endeavor to emulate that strong man of my race, who stood up among the early Reformers and boldly declared that 'Our religion has only one foundation, one object, one head, Jesus Christ, blessed forever. Let us not then, take the name of Paul, of Apollos, or of Peter. The cross of Christ alone opens heaven, and shuts the gates of hell.' A century and a half ago, in the first struggles of our Reformation, that Lefevre published a translation of the New Testament, and soon afterward, a version of the Psalms. Thus, through his instrumentality, the Word of God was diffused among men. The celebrated and beautiful sister of Frances I., Margaret of Valois, was converted to the new light by reading those powerful words, and henceforth a witness to the faith was not wanting among the high places of the land. Yes, I will proclaim aloud and spare not, for I feel as if commissioned by God himself to do so."

"And become a martyr to your zeal, like so many that have gone before you," said his daughter, mournfully.

"What matters it? shall I not be doing the work of the Master? 'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church;' and if I am found worthy to bear witness to my faith, even by the sacrifice of life itself, it will be to my everlasting joy and happiness hereafter. My prayer shall be, 'O Lord, let me not shrink from any ordeal thou mayest see fit to allot thy servant; for I would do thy bidding, at the sacrifice of life itself.'"

Suffering and intense emotion had wrought M. Lefevre up to a pitch of enthusiasm that seemed almost like exultation over the dangers which menaced him; and his daughter listened with a heavy and foreboding heart to words that bore with them the presage of the dark future that lowered before them.

M. Lefevre sat down on the side of the couch, and laying his hand on the clasped ones of his wife, he seemed absorbed in communion with her spirit; for his lips moved, and his eyes were raised with that rapt expression which the countenance wears when the mental vision pierces beyond the narrow physical sense, and pictures forms not of earth upon the impalpable air.

Gradually his lips parted, his brow beamed with a rapturous expression, and broken words seemed to come at intervals from his inner soul.

"I see thee! A tender smile is in thine eyes, oh my beloved! The white-robed messengers are around thee! They bear thee away to the land of life immortal, but thou yet lingerest to breathe consolation into my soul. Hark! what says that heavenly voice? 'Have courage—the end will compensate; walk bravely in thy path, and tread the hydra-headed monster beneath thy feet.' I will, I will! But do not go—linger yet one moment! You *must* leave me? Then obey the summons, and I—oh, my Heavenly Father, give me strength to return to darkness—to struggle on this dim earth after beholding a glimpse of thy glory!"

The expression of exultation faded away, the light slowly waned from his features, and a dull, gray hue overspread them, while his head drooped upon his breast, and his fingers convulsively loosed their clasp on the cold hands with a shudder that thrilled through his frame. He muttered, in tones of inexpressible sadness,

"I shall behold her no more till we meet in our Father's kingdom."

The excitement was past, and he sunk slowly back, and lay before his alarmed daughter in a species of catalepsy,

from which all her efforts failed to arouse him. Twilight darkened in the tower, and on its stillness came the sound of the mad revels of the dragoons; and the unhappy girl knelt beside the couch on which her parents lay, and poured forth an agonized prayer for help. She dared not seek assistance, for danger of every kind menaced one of her faith, should she venture beyond the protection of her own roof.

At length a stealthy step was heard in the next apartment, and a hesitating knock came to the door. A new fear assailed her, that one of the intoxicated soldiers was about to intrude into the room, and she listened in breathless terror for its repetition. It did not come, but the door was slowly opened, and the same man who had manifested some sympathy for the hapless family stood before her, bearing a light in his hand. He addressed her with rough courtesy:

"I heard the voice of mademoiselle speaking as if in great suffering, and I ventured to come and offer my services, if they can be of any use."

The pallid face and wild expression of Irene seemed to startle the man, for he advanced a step into the room. She pointed in silence to the rigid form of her father, but her parched lips refused to utter a sound. The soldier comprehended his situation at a glance, and raising M. Lefevre in his strong arms, he elevated his head, and taking from his pocket a flask of brandy, poured a small quantity into his mouth.

The change of position, and the strong stimulus combined, again started the languid current of life, and he looked around with returning intelligence. In a few moments more he sat up quite restored. With a long-drawn sigh he said,

"I had a glimpse of heaven, but it has vanished. It is the will of God that I shall return to this dreary strife with evil and persecution, and I submit with all becoming humility. My Father will summon me in his own good time. Ha! who is this, wearing the livery of my foes, who affords me succor?"

The dragoon respectfully answered,

"My name is Ammonet, and you should know me as one of the band of soldiers lodged in the chateau. But my heart is not made of stone, and when you spoke of your dead wife to-night, I felt for you, and refused to join in the revels of my comrades. I left them and wandered through the vacant rooms. I heard the young lady's voice suppliant for help as I ventured to stand near the door, and I thought it best to bring in a light and see if I could do any thing to serve her."

"Thanks for your kindness," said Lefevre, offering him his hand. "All pity, then, is not dead even in the hearts of those commissioned to work us evil. But I beg that you will not compromise yourself, my friend, by showing sympathy for one of our banned and persecuted sect. Leave us to God and our sorrows. He will, in his own good time, find the means of deliverance."

Ammonet bowed respectfully and turned to Irene :

"If mademoiselle would deign to remember my features, I may at some time be able to assist her again. In such times as these the help of the humblest may not be scorned."

"Certainly not, by one as helpless as I am," she gently replied. "I thank you, and I will remember with pleasure that among the band of lawless beings commissioned to destroy all that was most dear and sacred to us in our home, there is one deserving the name of a man—one who does not forget that we are fellow-beings capable of suffering as keenly as if we believed, as he does, in the power of the mass. You have my sincere and heartfelt thanks, M. Ammonet, for your assistance to-night. To it, I believe, my father owes his life."

The soldier again bowed profoundly, and moved toward the door ; as he laid his hand upon it he paused, and again turned toward Mademoiselle Lefevre. He said, with some hesitation,

"The captain will be here in a few more hours. If mademoiselle will commission me to speak a word to him,

he will stop the carousing of these men, and she can have quiet during the night."

An expression of painful indecision swept over the face of Irene, but after a moment's reflection she decisively said,

"No, it can not be so. Captain Delmont must act as he pleases. I can not ask forbearance at his hands."

Ammonet passed from the room, and M. Lefevre said,

"You are right, my child. Delmont would found hopes on such a request which must inevitably be disappointed. But what can detain Claude to this late hour?"

"He could scarcely venture to come, father, before the earth is veiled in darkness. Hark! There is a sound of approaching footsteps on the stairs. Heaven grant that it may be Claude!"

CHAPTER III.

AFTER a moment of intense solicitude the panel again opened, and a young man stepped into the room. He was clad in a plain suit of black, without any of the outward adornment practiced by the foppery of the age. His figure was well proportioned, and his movements had a decision in them which spoke of self-reliance and firm will.

His features were too strongly marked to be called handsome, but there was fire, life, and energy in every line, and his dark gray eyes had power of expression which revealed depths of feeling and tenderness in that strong soul that weaker ones could never know. It was a face to trust, a heart to lean securely on, and the two desolate beings who welcomed his entrance felt as if human help and sympathy had again dawned on them.

Chastain approached them and clasped the hand of both father and daughter in his own, as he said, in a voice that vibrated with peculiar clearness and accuracy,

"I have tarried long, my dear friends, but I thought it best to wait until there was no risk of interruption from the soldiers: once at their bacchanalian orgies, and I knew I could reach you without observation. I was the more careful in this, because I am accompanied by one who must not be seen by them, and he only awaits this announcement to come in. The venerable father, Jerome Lecroix, arrived in town last night, and he comes with me to offer you the consolations of our faith, and to assist in performing the last sacred rites to our departed friend."

At this announcement a gleam, almost of joy, flashed over the features of M. Lefevre.

"Bring him in at once, my son. This noble and consistent follower of our faith is welcome to my heart. In

prosperity I revered and honored him ; in ruin and anguish I can only give him the greeting of a brother in affliction ; but he is welcome, as are all the children of God, to my desolate roof."

As he finished speaking, a slender form, slightly bowed by years, stood in the aperture with his hands raised above his head, and in a clear, deep-toned voice, that vibrated on the ear long after his words were uttered, said :

"May the blessing of Heaven rest with you, my dear and afflicted friends," and the venerable pastor of the desert stepped into the room and advanced to greet M. Lefevre and his daughter.

Long past the meridian of life, his hair fell in silvery lines on either side of a face of delicate and almost spiritual beauty. The earthly passions of this noble and true Christian had so long been held in subjection by the elevating sense of his high destiny, that "the peace which passeth all understanding" seemed to have stamped itself upon his features, and an expression of serene majesty rested as a halo round them. This feeble-looking man, devoting the remnant of his long life to the service of that God whose ministry he had assumed in youth, was one of those whose church had been destroyed, whose people had been persecuted with all the sickening horrors with which the annals of the times are filled, and a price set on his own head.

Almost by a miracle had the faithful pastor been preserved, through many hair-breadth escapes, to continue his labors amidst the places made desolate by the strong arm of authority. He traveled from one department to another, thus evading pursuit, and carrying with him constancy and consolation to the persecuted Huguenots, shrinking from no duty however arduous, braving every danger that menaced him, bearing only the armor of righteousness as his protection.

M. Lecroix found means to keep up an intercourse with his exiled brethren in Holland and Switzerland, and even with the court of Louis, from which he received constant

information of what most nearly concerned the interests of the Protestants. The vigilance of the Papists had been wonderfully evaded by this modern Apostle, and the protection of Heaven seemed, indeed, to be cast as a shield around him. He rarely remained long in any one place; he came in secret, was received by the faithful, and departed as mysteriously as he arrived; and never yet had M. Lecroix fallen into the snare of his enemies, though he had been sought after with a perseverance worthy of a better cause.

M. Lefevre and his daughter bowed reverently before him, while Chastain took the precaution to bar the door leading into the body of the house to prevent intrusion on the part of the dragoons.

"My son," said the man of God, "the words of the prophet may be applied almost literally to the condition of our unhappy people. 'They shall not regard the honor of the old, nor show favor to the young; they shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed. Who also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine and flocks of sheep, until they have destroyed thee.' Thus is it with thee, oh, my brother! but he who permitteth these things, neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, and the sufferings of his people shall ultimately work together for the cause of truth. The eternal seed that germinates in the hearts of men at the bidding of God shall give them strength to bear witness to the cause, even amidst sorrow, persecution, and death."

"I sincerely believe it," responded Lefevre, devoutly. "May it indeed be so with me, holy father in the faith. I now ask but one privilege of Heaven, and that is, to assume the sacred calling of proclaiming aloud the truths of the Gospel of Christ."

The pastor regarded him searchingly.

"And that desire, my brother, does it spring from a sincere and conscientious conviction that you are really commissioned to do your Master's work? or from the oppres-

sion of earthly grief over the ruin of your fortunes, and the severing of the tenderest tie which bound you to earth?"

"If I understand the workings of my own spirit, it is of God. Let me go forth, a wanderer in the desert like yourself, to carry consolation to those who suffer as I have suffered. The purpose of Heaven in sending these afflictions will then, I believe, be fulfilled. Lay your consecrated hands upon my head, and give me authority to go forth as an apostle of the purer faith. I will not shrink even from martyrdom in the sacred cause. Martyrdom!" he repeated, with stern emphasis; "what is physical torture, however terrible, in comparison with the mental anguish, I have endured? What fiery ordeal applied to the outward man could make my soul shrink within me after the sufferings of the past year?"

"And your daughter? what becomes of her if you adopt this wandering life?"

Claude Chastain had listened to their words with absorbing interest; at this question he stepped forward, and clasping the hand of Irene in his own, spoke,

"That has long been settled between M. Lefevre and myself. He gives his daughter to me as my wife; then he is free to go on his holy mission."

Irene unclosed her pale lips to speak, but M. Lecroix interrupted her.

"My son, will not this be a dangerous proceeding for you? You are not suspected of heretical opinions. If discovered, your defection from the Romish faith will be most severely punished; and if you take to your home as a wife the daughter of a marked man like M. Lefevre, suspicion will at once be thrown on you. You will be watched; your true sentiments discovered; and such extreme measures taken against you as these cruel times seem to warrant."

"Our pastor only speaks what is in my own heart, dear Claude," said the tremulous voice of Irene; "and I must refuse to become yours so long as your choice can bring danger upon you. When my father leaves me I can seek an

asylum among some of our Protestant friends, who will afford me protection."

"How can they protect you, Irene, who are themselves hourly menaced with danger in every form? No; I have long foreseen this hour, and steadily prepared for it. Loathsome as it is to me to conceal my true sentiments and wear the mask of Papistry when I have really abjured it, yet I submit to do so for the sake of those I would serve and save from the fangs of the blood-stained priesthood. I am steadily making arrangements to escape the surveillance in which we are held, and in a few more weeks we can join the friends who have already escaped from this province to England, and from there embark for her colonies in the New World, where freedom to pursue our own mode of worship will be guaranteed to us. Your father will accompany us to our new home, and find a field in which to exercise his new vocation. Give me the certainty that I can claim you as my own, dear Irene, and I shall go forward with my arrangements with the full assurance of ultimate success."

Thus urged to complete an engagement which had existed almost from childhood, Irene looked appealingly toward her father. He replied by joining the hands of the two, and saying,

"Already has the mandate been issued which places my daughter under the control of her mother's family, with a view of proselyting her to the Romish faith. The priest, Antoine de Chalus, was here but now, and proclaimed that he possesses the authority to remove her from my protection, but forbore to use it while I was in such deep affliction. We must take advantage of this brief respite to give my child a stronger protection than parental authority is considered in this unhappy country; therefore, Claude, I give her to you, on the condition that the tie is kept a profound secret until we have escaped the evils that surround us, and in a free country can proclaim our acts without fear."

"I accept the conditions, and pledge my honor to abide by them."

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"Then here, in the presence of the mother whose spirit yet lingers around the scene of her earthly joys and trials, I give our child to you, who were won to the true faith by her influence. Remain steadfast in it amidst temptations and persecutions, my son; and should need be, shrink not from confessing before men the truths that are in your heart."

"I will never shrink from the duty of an honorable and Christian man," replied Chastain, earnestly. "Irene," he whispered, "are you contented that it shall be so? Do you willingly give yourself to me in this unceremonious manner?"

She tremulously replied,

"Ah! if I could only be sure that through me no evil would come to you."

"On earth good and evil are ever mingled, and we must take them as they come. To my heart the good so far outweighs the possible evil in the present crisis, that I am more than willing to take all the risks. Give me the coveted right to protect you, and all shall be well with us."

The heavy eyes that looked up to his brightened as they caught the intense earnestness of his expression, and her lips trembled with emotion as Irene bowed her head and murmured,

"Be it so, then; I will become yours."

Chastain pressed her hand fervently, and drew her forward until they stood in front of the pastor. The brief and simple marriage ceremony used by the Reformers was soon over, and then M. Lecroix motioned to Lefevre to kneel; placing his hands upon his bowed head, he uttered an invocation of pure and sublime eloquence to Heaven, in which he dedicated the remaining years of his friend's life to the cause of God.

At its conclusion the pastor thus addressed Lefevre: "Brother, you are now commissioned to go forth to speak comfort to the sorrowful; to sustain the weak-hearted, and be a co-worker with the strong. Our enemies would ob-

ject that this informal ceremony is useless, and unworthy of the august service to which you have thus devoted yourself; but by diligent study of the Scriptures, I can not find that Christ considered formal ceremonies as of any worth. His acts were simple and natural, and I have not learned that he considered the elaborate ritual of either the Jewish or the pagan churches of his day as essential to prepare a man to take upon himself the office of teacher. Simple and earnest faith, a loving and true heart, with an upright and pure life, was all he asked from those he consecrated to the high destiny of disseminating the doctrines he taught. Emulate their example, my brother, and his blessing will follow your efforts to do good; and should the crown of martyrdom be yours, he will receive you into the everlasting glory prepared for those who have fought the good fight, and remained faithful to the end."

"Amen," was solemnly responded by all present, and Lefevre arose with the serenity of a soul at peace with itself stamped upon his features. After a brief pause the pastor said,

"My time grows brief, my friends; and we must hasten to the conclusion of our duties. Before midnight I must again be on the move. I have work before me, and here danger hourly menaces me."

Chastain left the side of Irene and descended the stairs. They wound tortuously through the thickness of the wall, and in the midst of a darkness that was so dense it might almost be felt, he found his way to the bottom of the flight. The entrance was covered with low shrubbery and matted vines, and it opened upon an area shaded by forest trees. As Chastain issued from it, he imitated the whistle of a bird that built in the neighboring underwood; the signal was cautiously responded to, and he stepped forth, assured that it would be safe to do so. A dark form arose from the grass, and in reply to his inquiry if all was quiet, the watcher replied,

"Perfectly so, monsieur. Once I thought I heard a

rustling among the dead leaves, but I could see nothing, though I walked around and examined every suspicious-looking place."

Chastain glanced through the dim light of a starlit night, and slowly measured the sward with a cautious tread, to satisfy himself that no lurking straggler was near to interrupt the solemn ceremonial which night and darkness must shroud from the gaze of men, or the actors in it be punished with loss of liberty, perhaps of life; for the Huguenots were denied the privilege of burying their dead with any of the outward tokens of respect so sacred to the hearts of the survivors.

Then, with the assistance of this man, a hand-bier, on which rested a coffin, was brought from the concealment of a neighboring thicket, and placed near the entrance. The lid was removed, and the white folds of linen, which formed a portion of the lining, were carefully turned back to admit the expected tenant. Chastain then whispered,

"Remain beside it, Ferron, till my return, and do not relax your vigilance."

The width of the stairs rendered it impossible to take the coffin up, and there remained no resource but to bring the body of the dead and place it in its last earthly receptacle in the open air.

When he again entered the tower, he found M. Lefevre and his daughter kneeling on each side of the couch, while the pastor prayed fervently for resignation and comfort to the grief-stricken. When the prayer was ended the young man drew near, and said in a low tone,

"All is ready below. Let me bear my beloved friend in my arms."

"No, my son, that duty is mine alone," said Lefevre steadily; "I must perform for her the last earthly service she may require."

Again that long last look was fastened on the still features which stamps them upon the memory for aye. They repressed their tears that the serene beauty of that image

should not be marred by human emotion, and then with reverential affection folded the winding-sheet around her.

M. Lefevre raised the attenuated form in his arms as easily as if it had been that of a child, and, preceded by Chastain bearing the lamp, while the pastor followed with Irene, the mournful procession descended the steps. Before issuing into the open air the young man extinguished the light lest it might betray them; and by the pale glimmer of the stars the body of Madame Lefevre was placed in the coffin, and the lid screwed down.

This was done rapidly and carefully, for there was no time to pause in the dangerous duties before them. The right of sepulture in consecrated ground had long been denied to the Reformers. Their own burial-places had been desecrated and taken from them by violence; and, of course, the body of no heretic would be received in a Romish cemetery. About half a mile from the chateau was a narrow dell shaded by willow-trees, which had been secretly consecrated as the last home of the dead according to the rites practiced by the Protestants. Several humble retainers of the family had already found sepulture there; but great care had been taken to remove every trace of such a ceremony having taken place, lest their remains should be torn from the grave, and insulted by the reckless and dissolute soldiery quartered on every Huguenot proprietor in the country.

To this secluded spot the bier was now borne by the four men; while Irene, unsupported by any loving arm, walked alone in the rear, her heart filled with sorrow for the dead, and sad forebodings for the living.

The pathway struck into the heart of the deep woodland, and soon afterward the party emerged into the little area consecrated as the field of God. A dark gap at the foot of a slight elevation revealed an open grave, and with reverential care the coffin was lowered into it, and the sods replaced. The turf had been carefully removed from the surface and laid on one side; after smoothing down the earth

as evenly as possible, it was replaced, and a few wild vines torn from the trees around were thrown over the spot, to conceal every evidence of what had been done. Then all knelt with uncovered heads, and the pastor concluded the ceremony by a few touching sentences. The simple rite was ended, and they prepared to retrace their steps to their different destinations. M. Lecroix first spoke:

"Adieu, my friends. I thank our mutual Father that I came hither in time to be of assistance to you. Walk all of ye in the path that leads to everlasting life. You, my brother in the faith, with the consciousness of the noble duties you have this night assumed—you, my children, with pure hearts before the Most High, perform those obligations to each other, and to society, which you so lately ratified. That you may find joy in your union, and safety in the new home you intend to seek, is the prayer of my heart."

M. Lefevre and his daughter reverently kissed the hands of the venerable man of God, and returned affecting thanks for the sacred duty he had performed for them. Claude Chastain whispered a few tender words to his newly-wedded bride, and with a promise of an interview on the next evening at the same hour, he turned away with the pastor, and plunged into the deep woodland.

It was surprising to see with what lightness and activity the latter threaded his way through the tortuous pathway. Long habit had strengthened him for the hardships he cheerfully encountered; and in spite of his apparent feebleness, M. Lecroix could bear a greater amount of fatigue than many a younger and more robust man.

Gradually they approached the town of Nismes, which lay silent and dark before them. The inhabitants had principally retired, and the sounds of active life had subsided into that impressive quiet which broods over a large town by night. The two wanderers entered it by an unfrequented suburb, and without meeting any interruption, proceeded to the residence of Chastain.

This he entered by means of a pass-key he carried about his person. It was one of a long row of antique-looking brick buildings, lying directly upon one of the main thoroughfares. Chastain led the way into a large room, evidently occupied as a lawyer's office. Shelves lined two sides of the wall, filled with ponderous tomes containing the legal lore of the country; and the third one supported tin cases labeled with the names of those clients whose most important papers were confided to the young advocate's care.

The fourth side had in it a large bow window that looked into a yard filled with shrubbery and trees. Office-chairs and a table completed the furniture. Opening from this, was a smaller room fitted up as a sleeping apartment; and the host unclosed the door immediately, and said,

"Good father, you are wearied, and must rest before you leave; lie on my bed, and endeavor to sleep while I have supper prepared for you."

"My son, sleep is far from my eyelids. I must talk with you; and while my frail body rests, you can sit beside me, and tell me of the condition of our persecuted people in these cruel times."

"Alas!" replied Chastain, dejectedly, "what I have to relate must only fill your feeling soul with horror. Words can scarcely do justice to the condition of the hapless Protestants under the iron rule of the Duc de Noailles. The strong arm of power is with him, and he delegates the atrocities sanctioned in the name of religion to D'Aguesseau and the abbot of the Dominicans, commonly known as Father Antoine. M. Lecroix, if I had not already embraced the Reformed faith, what I have seen and heard here would have made me a convert to its tenets."

The pastor asked,

"As an adherent of our faith, how do you conceal the true fire that animates you? especially when you see and hear of the persecutions of your brethren?"

Chastain changed color, and forcibly compressed his lips,

as if struggling to restrain the expression of his feelings. He presently said,

"I have often felt that this deception is unworthy of a follower of Him who has said that his disciples shall confess him before men; but the safety of the only near friends I possess would be so seriously compromised if I openly renounced the faith in which I have been educated, that I shrink from doing so. To the family of M. Lefevre I am chiefly indebted for the new light I have received; and you are aware that severe penalties are enforced against those who aid a Catholic in clearing his doubts, and finding the truth, unencumbered by the mass of falsehood and error which ages of superstition and blind reverence for the dogmas of the popes have accumulated in the Romish Church. Were I suspected of leaning toward the Protestants, M. Lefevre would at once be accused of proselyting me; he would be thrown into prison, and treated with every indignity. Besides, if I avow my principles, I shall be deprived of the power of assisting those of my faith who can now come to me in secret as you have done."

"Your reasons are good, my son; but I warn you to make such immediate preparations for emigration as may be within your means, for the few privileges still conceded to us shall soon be torn away. I have reliable information from a friend at court that the edict granted our people by the great Henry will be revoked, and more strenuous measures taken to compel all men to conform to the Church which the king's wisdom considers the only true one."

Chastain seemed scarcely surprised. He sorrowfully replied,

"Events have long tended to this consummation. Louis would do well to read the history of Charles V. of Spain, and take heed to his words, when he found it impossible to make two watches run alike out of the hundreds he had collected. Does the king suppose that the consciences of men are more easily managed than a piece of machinery? It is worse tyranny than the fabled bed of Procrustes thus to

compel conformity in a matter that concerns the future welfare of the soul alone. You speak wisely, Father Lecroix. I will leave this ruined and oppressed land as speedily as may be, and take with me those who have already so deeply suffered. In a new country I can open a career for myself, where the majesty of God's voice, ringing through the soul its message of truth, shall not be insulted by the miserable and degraded priests who call themselves the servants of St. Peter. Truly, Peter denied his Lord on that awful night when Pilate sat in judgment on him; and his conduct on that occasion seems typical of the Church his successors rule over, for truth, purity, and humanity are trampled under foot by them as recklessly as if the doctrines taught by Christ were not imbued with their spirit. I have no hope for this priest-ridden land; and, therefore, dear as is its sacred sod to my heart, I will seek a foreign soil, on which I hope to aid in erecting a nation to whom freedom of conscience, at least, shall be secured. Father Lecroix, you are far advanced in the vale of years, and can not much longer bear the fatigues you have so faithfully endured in the cause of your master. Join our little band of wanderers, and when we reach the promised land you shall be the patriarch of our flock, and the dearly-cherished friend of every heart among them."

The pastor shook his head.

"The temptation is strong, but I may not listen to it, Claude. No! My lot is appointed here to lighten the burdens of those who may not escape; to raise my voice for the truth; to perish, if need be, in its defense. I have no tie that binds me to earth save that yearning love for suffering humanity that bids me never to relax in my efforts to alleviate their woes—to sustain the courage of the saints, whose blood is made to flow as water. Providence has hitherto most wonderfully protected me, and so long as I am needed I believe it will continue to do so. When my work is ended, I am ready to go in the manner appointed by my Father in heaven, who ordereth the ways of men with

a wisdom superior to any we can use. Let me wear out in doing His will, and I am content."

Chastain listened with reverence to this feeble-looking being, animated and sustained in his arduous life by a spirit that never seemed to flag, and he felt almost inclined to believe that some supernatural power from on high was bestowed upon him. He asked,

"Whither do you turn your steps when you leave Nismes?"

"I go on a brief mission to Holland, to bear to my brethren there an account of the miseries I have witnessed in my visits to the lands that once flourished as a garden of Paradise, now laid in desolation and ruin by the savage spirit of persecution which has been let loose upon it. What madness must have seized the king to induce him thus to wreck the material prosperity of the country, whose interests he is bound to protect, even if no higher motive could move him. In my journey hither I have passed through whole districts, once the abode of peace and plenty, now a barren waste, with uncultivated fields, falling houses, and dismantled churches, depopulated by the wide emigration which took place before such rigorous laws were enacted against it. I have beheld misery that made my heart shrink within me; for every degree of punishment short of immediate death is sanctioned by the government, and the brutal soldiery let loose on the Protestant provinces of France are indeed fit emissaries of the author of all evil. Oh, my country! my country! when shall this ban be raised, and the free soul dare to breathe aloud the praises of its great Creator? In thy own good time, O Lord, we know this will be done, and weak, short-sighted mortals must wait on thee in faith and hope."

His lips moved some moments as if in silent prayer, and then he arose and earnestly continued:

"A short time since our brethren thought that the doctrine of passive resistance had been carried too far; that they were the more oppressed because the king, from their

quietness, imagined them to be extinct. A simultaneous rising in every department was organized, not for seditious purposes, but merely to show those in authority how strong we really are; and thus was beheld the moving sight of thousands of human beings who had borne so much for conscience' sake, meeting amidst the ruins of their demolished temples and offering services to Him to whom they were dedicated. I have been present at many of these meetings, and I now go back to my exiled brethren to bear to them the information that this also was in vain. Our assembling thus together only suggested to the court party the idea of a second massacre similar to that of St. Bartholomew."

Chastain uttered an exclamation of horror.

"Surely that extreme will never again be attempted."

"I trust not; but it was pressed on the king by his priestly advisers, and he began to think seriously of it. Fortunately the Prince of Condé was informed of what was in agitation in time to point out to Louis all the evils of so terrible a proceeding. Slow torture was therefore sanctioned, while one grand and decisive blow was thought unsafe. But I must leave you, my young friend. The night wanes, and I have taken all needful rest."

Chastain arose, and opening a door in the wall, took from a recess within cold meat, bread, and wine. Of these the pastor sparingly partook, and, while so doing, his young companion wrote rapidly on a sheet of paper he drew before him. Having folded and sealed it, he gave it to M. Lecroix, and said,

"I have in this brief letter given an account to Colonel Lefevre of what has recently occurred here. He is an officer of distinction in the army of Flanders, and he is not aware that such persecutions have been endured by his family. He believes that his own gallant services in the royal cause entitle them to exemption; but in the evil days on which we have fallen, no plea avails to shelter a Protestant gentleman from insult. I have barely written

the facts, and leave to you the details, as the letter will doubtless induce Lefevre to seek you out at any inconvenience to himself."

"If I live to reach Holland, it shall surely get to him in safety. Alas! I am only the bearer of disastrous intelligence to my exiled countrymen. Ah! why is the power to crush and destroy millions thus delegated to one man? It will not be ever thus: the very movement the religious world is now making is the prelude to freeing men from the tyranny of despotism. Without freedom man can never rise to that elevation designed for him by his Creator, and in time he will surely bestow it on him."

M. Lecroix concealed the letter in the folds of his coat, and immediately afterward the same man entered who had assisted at the burial of Madame Lefevre. He was the clerk of Chastain, and at his command had accompanied M. Lefevre and his daughter on their return to the tower. He now came to report that he had seen them safe within the secret entrance before returning.

"And every thing seemed quiet?" asked the young man with solicitude.

"Yes, sir, every thing seemed just as we left it. The lamp was where you placed it, and I struck a light for them. I saw them safe up the first winding of the stairs, and then came away."

In fancy Chastain followed them to that lone and desolate room, accompanied by their heavy load of sorrow, and his head drooped upon his breast; but there was no time for the intrusion of thought. He must get his guest safely on his journey, and again the three sallied forth on the deserted streets. A short walk brought them to the outskirts of the town, and under the shelter of an old wall a mule ready caparisoned was held by a muffled figure. A few earnest words were exchanged, and then bidding them an affectionate adieu, the venerable pastor set out alone on his night journey, carrying with him a supply of such simple food as he needed, and a blanket on which to repose his

weary frame when it would not be safe to seek the shelter of a roof.

In those days of trial many such devoted followers of the faith were found, who came as a sunbeam into places made desolate by despotism, and hence their name of Pastors of the Desert.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the priestly procession left the tower, the abbot of the Dominicans walked at its head, carrying in his hand a rosary, for which those of his order have a profound reverence, since it is asserted by them that the Virgin Mary herself gave this absurd form of prayer to Dominic di Gusman, their founder. In his day fatal use had been made of the rosary, which it has been said was the Marseillaise Hymn of the Papists in their persecutions of the Waldenses, in Languedoc, Narbonne, and Dauphiny—for a hardy race of mountaineers inhabited those provinces, who refused to relinquish their religious belief at the dictation of the priests—and the descendants of the primitive Christians were destroyed with fire and sword, at intervals, for several centuries. Father Antoine—for with pretended humility such was the title he chose to assume among the people—walked with bowed head, mechanically repeating the hundred and fifty Ave Marias commanded by the Virgin to be said in her honor, while his mind was really filled with schemes for bringing back the miserable heretics to the yoke of Rome. To restore the Church to the evil supremacy it enjoyed in the thirteenth century, when the mightiest princes trembled at the anathema of its head, when human rights were placed entirely at the mercy of a corrupt and ambitious Pope, aided by a priesthood so profligate that it was profanation in them to take the name of God upon their unholy lips, was the sole thought that occupied his subtle mind.

The rejection of the holy emblems by the contumacious Lefevre filled him with rage, and he was resolute to punish him speedily and severely. The evening air was filled with the heavy perfume from the censers which the acolytes swung with a zeal that was greatly increased by the con-

tempt with which their ministrations had been recently refused.

The procession had proceeded through the forest about a quarter of a mile in the direction of the town, when it suddenly came to an open space occupied by a cottage of humble appearance, but bearing about it evidences of taste in its occupants. The walls were covered with vines so thickly matted together as to resemble a solid mass of verdure, and the yard in front was surrounded by a hedge of evergreens, while within the inclosure bloomed a few late flowers.

On a rustic portico in front of the cottage sat a girl of tender years, singing a psalm in a voice of clear, bird-like melody. She wore the common dress of the peasantry in that portion of the country; and the scarlet boddice, cut low on the neck, with short sleeves, showed the symmetry of a neatly-rounded form, though the smooth skin was browned to the hue of the berry. The soft black eyes and raven hair harmonized, however, with this complexion, and as she leaned against the dark background, made by the shining leaves of the ivy that covered the walls, she looked, in the gathering twilight, like a vivid picture of youthful joy, over whom the sad condition of her native land had not yet possessed the power to cast a shadow.

She held a piece of work in her busy fingers, and as she bent her head over it, she was so intensely occupied that she heeded not the approach of the holy procession until, at a sign from the abbot, it stopped in front of the cottage. The sweet melody continued to ring out clear and full until the voice of the priest, speaking in tones of stern anger, startled her from her unconsciousness.

"Girl, are you not the daughter of Laval, the forester?"

She started, looked up, and at the sight of those before her grew pallid as death; for, young as she was, she had learned to dread the appearance of the so-called vicegerents of Heaven as the prelude to bitter suffering to those that were dear to her.

"Why do you not answer?" he harshly asked, as she

stood mute and trembling before him. In reply she faltered,

"I—I was so startled. Pardon me, Father! Yes, I am the daughter of the forester. My parents are away, and while I watched for them I sang. Oh, Father Antoine, pardon me! I had forgotten that we are forbidden to sing the Psalms; and indeed—indeed, I did not see the holy emblems coming!"

"Why do you not now kneel before them, wretched little heretic?" he thundered. "You know it is not permitted to your people to sing at all when this holy procession passes by, and yet you dared run such a risk! Do you know that severe punishment is decreed against those who are guilty of such irreverent conduct?"

The girl, trembling in every limb, sunk upon her knees, and raised her clasped hands deprecatingly toward him. A sudden thought struck the priest. He said, in the same commanding tone,

"Ask pardon for your crime in the name of holy Mother Church, or it shall go hard with you."

She gained courage to murmur,

"I have been taught to pray only in the name of Christ."

"And is not He, then, the head and founder of our Church? Pooh! child, who has taught you such absurd distinctions? Do as I bid you, or I will find means to make your heretical parents suffer for having so badly trained you."

This threat destroyed the little courage the girl had been able to summon. She faintly said,

"Oh no—on me let your anger fall. Spare my good father and mother. They have often admonished me not to sing the Psalms, but I love them so much, I forgot. Oh! Father Antoine, it was only my own heedlessness; it was no fault of my parents."

"Then expiate your sin as I shall command, or take the consequences. Repeat after me a solemn recantation of the errors in which you have been reared; only on this con-

dition will I pardon the breach of the laws of which you have been guilty. Refuse, and before the night has waned your whole family shall be cast into a dungeon, there to perish in their heresy, ruined in this world, and lost in the next."

His words were addressed to a child of fourteen years, in mortal terror of his power, and he well calculated the effect they would produce. She glanced down the footpath leading to the cottage, but no form was approaching to sustain her sinking courage. She faltered,

"And shall my parents be safe from your anger if I do this?"

"They shall be; I promise it."

Again she wavered, and in great anguish exclaimed,

"Oh, Father Antaine, if you force me to this, my father will cast me from him as unworthy! He can never trust me again. I shall become an outcast from his heart. As you have mercy exact not this from me!"

The priest grimly smiled, for he enjoyed her terror.

"Weigh your fears of their anger against the certainty of the punishment I have threatened, and then decide. What seems hard in my conduct to you now, will in the future be regarded by you as a signal interposition of Heaven in your favor."

The girl scarcely understood him, so bewildered were her faculties. Her parents, like all the Huguenots, had suffered deeply for their steadfast adherence to the religion they espoused, and threats of violence had often been used toward them. They lived in hourly dread that their humble position might not be able to protect them from the pitiless wrath that swept as a whirlwind over the land, leveling alike the lordly tree and the humble flower that found shelter beneath its shadow.

As one of the tenants of the family at the chateau, Laval was regarded with a malignant eye by the priest, and he felt that a blow dealt against the honest and conscientious forester would be an additional affliction to the proprietor;

therefore was he more ruthless in his determination to tear this poor child from the protecting love of her parents. He more sternly asked,

"Are you not the same girl to whom the Sisters of Mercy lately offered the advantages of a superior education if you would abandon the errors inculcated by your parents?"

"The Sisters did make me such an offer, but I could not leave my home. Oh! Father Antoine, if you are really a good man, you will see that it is right to honor my father and mother as the Bible commands."

"And even to such as you the mysteries of that holy volume are laid bare by these sacrilegious heretics," said the priest, severely. "Its sacred truths are held by the wise of earth as beyond the comprehension of the unenlightened mind, and yet babes are trusted with them, that the carnal mind, which is at enmity against God, may find excuse for wandering from the true fold, and rebelling against the lawful authority of the Church. Girl, you have been badly trained by your parents, and it becomes my duty to remove you from their evil influence. Recant your errors as I command, or the strong arm of authority shall deal with those who have sinned against their duty toward you by risking the salvation of your immortal soul."

By this time the child was so exhausted by fright that she was ready to obey any command he might give her. Of a highly nervous temperament, and easily excited; impressed from infancy with a deep dread of the power of the priesthood; a witness, as years advanced, of the ruthless use made of that power, poor little Lucille had not one spark of courage left in her palpitating heart to give life to a spirit of resistance. She could only falter,

"Holy Father, what shall I do to avert your anger?"

"Repeat after me a renunciation of the errors in which you have been reared, and I promise you protection and advancement, such as your parents never dreamed of for a child of theirs."

"Tell me, then, what I must say?"

The priest slowly repeated the form of words often dictated to children, and made by the laws binding upon them, even from the tender age of eight years. This recantation once uttered, the parents had no further power over them. They passed under the rule of the Church, and were trained in her dogmas, in defiance of all the opposition that could be offered by those to whom nature had alone given the right to control their opinions and form their characters.

Scarcely conscious of what she was doing, the faint voice of Lucille followed that of the priest, and when the fatal words were ended she fell forward with her face upon the turf, in an agony of emotion that would have touched any heart not utterly hardened by fanaticism.

Father Antoine said,

"Rise, daughter of the true faith, and follow me to an asylum where care and tenderness shall compensate you for the separation from those who have trained you only in heresy and rebellion."

"It is false," said a loud voice, and a man of tall and powerful frame bounded through the open door of the cottage. His black eyes were blazing with excitement, and his lips were white and tremulous with emotion. He raised his daughter from the ground, and, facing the priest, asked with a sort of subdued desperation,

"What does this mean? What have you done to frighten this child so fearfully?"

"I have received her renunciation of the errors in which she was reared," he coldly replied, "and you well know to what measures that must lead."

Laval relaxed his grasp upon the form of Lucille, and staggered back. He muttered in a broken voice,

"O Lord, in whom I have trusted, thou hast not permitted this evil to fall on me! My own one, that I trained so carefully, to fall from grace in the first moment of temptation."

The girl clung to his knees and piteously begged forgiveness; but he loosened her clasp as he said,

"No, no; you have chosen your path, and you must walk in it. Henceforth I have no claim on you. Take her, priest; the renegade daughter will make a fitting follower of the great Moloch, into which you and such as you have turned the Church of the Most High God."

Laval and his wife had approached the cottage by a pathway leading to the rear of the building, and until they entered its walls they were not aware of the scene acting in front. The mother, pallid and nearly sinking with agitation, stood in the doorway, holding in her arms an infant a few months old.

Repulsed by her father, Lucille turned toward her, and she looked imploringly in her face as her white lips muttered,

"Mother, it was to save you all from the punishment due to my fault that I abjured. I forgot your warnings—I sang the Psalms, as the procession came by, and incurred the penalty of imprisonment to us all. It was better to bear the punishment myself than have it fall on all alike. My baby brother would have died in the dungeon, shut out from the light of heaven. My father's strong arm would have become palsied, you would have perished, and my heedlessness the cause of all. Was it not better to avert these dire calamities, at any cost to myself?"

"If your eternal welfare had not also been at stake," replied the agonized mother; "but with that, you had no right to tamper. One soul is of more worth than the earthly existence of many bodies. I would sooner have seen you perish, true to your faith, than thus weakly to have resigned it."

"Right, right, wife," said Laval, gloomily; then turning to the priest, he added, "And you have wrung from the fears of a weak child a recantation of all she has been taught to consider sacred; you will proclaim her enforced conversion as a triumph of the true faith over heretical doctrines. You have taken a cruel advantage of my absence to obtain from her terror what my daughter would never voluntarily have

acknowledged. She is yet too young to be responsible for her own acts."

"The law permits even younger children to choose the true faith," replied the abbott. "If she is old enough to comprehend error, she is also capable of following truth. Her choice is made, and she will not now be permitted to recoil from it: and learn farther, that only through forbearance, purchased by her submission, do I refrain from proceeding to extremities against you and your wife for your irreverent conduct in the presence of the sacred body of Christ. Come, girl, I have wasted too much time here; follow me, and take heed that you stray neither to the right nor to the left. I will place you at once with the Sisters of Mercy, where you will be well cared for."

Lucille arose, and stretched her arms imploringly toward her father. As if moved by an uncontrollable impulse, Laval rushed toward her, and pressed her with frantic force to his heart. His hand sought the handle of a knife he wore in his breast, and his fingers nervously clutched it, with the half-formed determination to take her life sooner than surrender her to the protection of the Church. The glittering blade was partly unsheathed, when Lucille comprehended his intention. She faintly said,

"Kill me, then; it will be better to die in your arms than to follow that man."

Her eyes were raised to his, and there was something in their expression that disarmed him. He groaned.

"Oh, had this spirit only sustained you until I came, I could have saved you. I will do it yet, my child, or die in the attempt. You shall not be twice lost—to your earthly parent, and to your Father in heaven."

He passionately kissed her cheek, lips, and brow, and then resigned her to her mother.

"You should have died sooner than recant," said the latter; "but since it is so, you must go, and we may never meet again. A blight has fallen on our humble home, and now a day, an hour may compass the destruction of us all."

Her words seemed to spring from a spirit of conviction, but they were uttered with a quiet calmness that betrayed the character of the woman. Reared in the Reformed faith, her life had been one continued dread of the persecutors of her people; and though ready at any moment to perish for the faith she professed, she had little strength to contend against actual persecution when it reached those that were dear to her.

Madame Laval knew that in resigning her daughter to the priest, she lost her as effectually as if death had taken her from her arms; yet she parted from her with apparent calmness. Lucille pressed the soft cheek of her infant brother to her lips in a transport of anguish which was increased by the laughing glee with which the little fellow bounded to meet her caress.

Then, with lingering steps, she went out of the little inclosure, and crossing her hands upon her breast, followed the procession with a world of suffering in the young heart lately so full of joyful hope and youthful happiness. She did not dare to give one backward glance to the home she was leaving, lest she should turn and fly again to the beloved ones whose hearts were riven with anguish at her loss.

Laval's burning eyes were fixed upon her receding form with feelings no language can portray. Powerless to gain redress for this great outrage against the holiest tie of nature, all the fire of his impetuous soul was aroused by the very consciousness of his inability to assert his right to protect his dearly-cherished daughter. Though lowly in station, and dependent on labor for his support, the forester, in spite of the religious persecution that raged around him, had enjoyed happiness in his humble home. The bright face, the sweet voice of his beautiful child, were his solace for every evil; and now she was torn from him to be placed under the powerful influence of that Church which never scrupled to use any means by which the minds of the young could be influenced. He knew Lucille to be imaginative and full of enthusiasm: when trained by the subtle intel-

lects that would now have entire control over her, what might be her future career? In imagination he beheld her the persecutor of the faith in which she had been reared—trampling under foot its simple and pure teachings, while she bowed in reverence before the blood-stained altar which emulated pagan cruelties in the tortures inflicted on its victims.

This picture was more than the father could bear; and uttering a fierce cry, with one bound he cleared the yard, as a bend in the pathway shut his daughter from his sight, and with fleet steps went in pursuit of her. He did not pause to reflect on the consequences—he only felt that he could die sooner than permit his darling child to be thus ruthlessly torn from him.

The abbot walked with slow and dignified motion, mechanically repeating his Aves, followed by the others, and the enraged father soon overtook them. The acolytes, apparently unmoved by the scene they had witnessed, swung their censers as accurately as ever, and the attendant priest also mumbled scraps of Latin which he dignified with the name of prayers, while Lucille walked after them with tears streaming over her pale features, yet no thought of rebelling against the cruel decision that tore her from her home had entered her heart.

In this she only practiced that submission to the higher powers which the Huguenots sedulously inculcated in all things that did not conflict with their duty to the Supreme Ruler. Suddenly the strong arms of her father were thrown around her, and she was born away as lightly and easily as if she had been an infant.

Instinctively she clung to him and buried her head in his bosom to shut out the threats and anathemas uttered by the priests when they became aware of the daring act perpetrated by the peasant. Laval was deaf to them all; he sped backward without one glance toward his persecutor, who smiled with a malignant consciousness of the power he possessed to bring speedy vengeance upon him, and he quick-

ened his pace that he might reach Nismes and send the myrmidons of the law to execute his will against the defenseless family. Laval reached his own door, and placing his daughter upon the floor, he sternly said,

"Now, Annette, let us make ready as quickly as we may to go out in the hills, for yon priest will lose no time in sending the dragoons to ferret us out. We must find a secure hiding-place before they come, or no sun will ever again rise on earth for you or me. 'Destroy the old, and make sure of the young,' is the command given in secret by the priests, just as if they were hunting beasts of prey. The evil we have long dreaded has come upon us at last, and we must not shrink from the conflict in the cause of our faith."

The mother cast a pitiful glance at the helpless infant she carried in her arms, but she said nothing. Laval understood the look, and his voice was slightly husky as he replied to it.

"He is a young sufferer in the cause of Christ; but he had better perish now in his innocence than be trained by priestly influence to become a persecutor of the faithful."

"Dear father," said Lucille, throwing herself upon her knees before him, "my weakness and disobedience has brought all this suffering upon me. Let me follow the priest, and avert his anger from you. I deserve the punishment, and I can bear it."

"Rise, my child, and help your mother to put up our scanty possessions. No evil to me could be so great as to suffer you to fall under the rule of that man. Comfort yourself, girl, for some pretext for tearing you from me would soon have been found, even if the innocent pastime of singing psalms in praise of our Creator had not afforded one to the wily priest."

Thus comforted, the poor girl, still trembling with agitation, followed her mother into the house: it consisted of two small rooms, divided by a plank partition, and contained such articles as were barely necessary to enable them to

live; but all were neat and well-kept. A bundle of clothing and such food as the cottage contained were hastily collected, and rolled in the blankets from the beds.

These Laval tied with a cord and slung them over his shoulder, while his wife took the infant in her arms and prepared to follow him. With stern and bitter hearts they bade adieu to the home which had sheltered them so many years; and as Lucille passed out, she plucked a spray from the ivy that clustered over the poor walls, to be kept as a memento of her childhood's home.

Sudden as this expulsion seemed, the possibility of it had been long familiar to the thoughts of the parents; for many like themselves had been forced to fly from the persecutions of the dominant party, and seek a refuge among the mountain fastnesses, which offered a shelter at least until they could find the means of leaving that land which refused protection to its conscientious children.

The forester was in constant communication with some of these refugees, and he at once took a pathway toward a defile that led into the very heart of the mountainous country.

They made their escape in time; for when they had ascended above the valley, the little party turned and looked back toward the spot occupied by their late home. Night by this time had fallen, and the red glare from a fire was thrown upon the darkened air. Laval pointed toward it and said,

"Behold, the priest has lost no time—our cottage is in flames!"

With that passive endurance which is the birth-right of some women, his wife heard his words; they smote painfully on her heart, and she said within her soul, "This is only the beginning; then exhaust not endurance by uttering a complaint;" and she bowed her head in silence, and turned away.

CHAPTER V.

IN the mean time Father Antoine proceeded toward Nismes, chafing with impatience to increase his pace that he might speedily sate the anger burning in his heart against the bold peasant who had defied his authority, yet compelled to act with outward decorum while walking at the head of the procession, until the sacred elements were placed with all due reverence in the chapel where they belonged.

This accomplished, he hurried to the residence of D'Aguesseau, the civil intendant, to relate what had occurred, and demand that a party of soldiers should at once be dispatched to the cottage of the forester to secure the whole family. The residence of the chief magistrate was only a few squares from the cathedral, and the abbot soon stood at the entrance. Even had his person and rank in the Church not been well known, his garb was sufficient to insure him an obsequious welcome, and a few muttered words gave him at once ingress into the sanctum of D'Aguesseau himself.

He was ushered into a small room lighted by an iron lamp suspended from the ceiling, and encumbered by no furniture, save a table occupying the whole length of the wall on one side, and a few chairs. The front of this table was filled with small drawers; and in these, carefully filed and labeled, were the accusations against the Huguenots of the country, with their names, fortunes, and individual character accurately set down, as a guide to the measures to be pursued against them.

Beneath the full glare of the lamp, sat the man into whose hands this terrible power was chiefly thrown—for the more revolting portion of the work to be done was given over to him by the Duc de Noailles; who chose only

to act in his military capacity, in furtherance of the commands of the court. It was not difficult to imagine that an accurate judge of human nature had selected D'Aguesseau for the office he filled. He was small and insignificant in appearance, with something in the crouching expression of his form that irresistibly reminded one of the tiger stooping for his deadly spring. His head was badly set on his shoulders; and the receding forehead, flattened toward the temples, the prominent eyes, wide nostrils, and thinly cut lips, closed with an expression of iron firmness, afforded some resemblance to the portraits of Robespierre. He also had the same bloodless complexion, with dark glittering eyes, observant as those of the lynx, cruel and unrelenting as only human eyes can become when the thirst of blood is aroused in the soul. Such was the man selected to co-operate with the priesthood in bringing back the lambs that had strayed from the true fold.

He was examining a paper closely written, and the Dominican stood a brief moment watching his features before he spoke. At the sound of his voice, D'Aguesseau turned sharply toward him, and a grim smile lighted up his face.

"Ha! welcome, Father; for I need your advice on a subject that is new to me. Here is a memorial I have but just received, which—"

With a movement of great deference, but which yet expressed authority that must be obeyed, the priest arrested his explanation.

"Pardon me, monsieur, but matters of weight must be at once attended to; after that can come what you desire to tell me. An act of most flagrant insubordination has just been committed against my authority, by a renegade to the holy Mother Church. Your interposition is required to punish it properly before the actors have time to escape into the mountain fastnesses which unhappily lie near us."

"Another defiance of the power that can crush and grind these wretches to atoms?" said the harsh voice of D'Aguesseau. "These heretic rascals are getting like the trodden

viper that turns and stings with its last gasp. What new cause of complaint have you now? I wish they had but one neck, that I might lay my grasp upon it, and choke the life from the vile gangrene on the face of the Church;" and he flourished his sinewy hand before him, which looked hard enough to perform any cruel service dictated by the ruthless spirit of its owner.

In a few words as possible Father Antoine related what had occurred, and the purple hue of anger glowed through the sallow cheeks of his listener. He violently rang a hand-bell which lay beside him: it was instantly responded to by the appearance of a servant at the door.

"Order the captain of the guard hither," was the brief command given. The man vanished, and in another moment the officer thus summoned entered from the ante-chamber. He was one who did not seem fitted by nature for the position he held under the authority of such a superior. His bearing was noble, and on his fine face resolution and coolness were stamped, mingled with something of the generous recklessness of youth. He drew himself up and stood with composed mien, awaiting the commands he had been summoned to receive.

"Captain Delmont," said D'Aguesseau, "you will, without the loss of a moment of time, detail a small party of soldiers to surround the cottage of Laval, the forester on the Lefevre estate; seize the family, and bring them hither as prisoners; raze the walls of their house to their foundations, and take good heed that none of the miserable recusants escape."

An expression of annoyance came for a moment on his face, but the officer bowed with his usual unmoved air; for such commands were of too frequent occurrence to elicit much feeling from those accustomed to receive them. He merely said,

"You shall be obeyed, monsieur."

He was leaving the apartment when the priest suggested, "Should the family, as is most probable, have escaped,

will it not be expedient to pursue them and bring them back?"

"Undoubtedly—such will be the instructions issued to the men, Captain Delmont. The parents are contumacious; and should the father resist, let them deal summarily with him, but bring back the daughter in safety. They will make for the hills; lose no time, and they may yet be intercepted."

Captain Delmont left the room, and as he went he muttered,

"So the old fox has found out this pretty little black-eyed girl at last. I have marveled some time how she has escaped priestly notice. Well, it's no business of mine, and I suppose it is time some effort was made to bring her back to the truth."

Captain Delmont, in his turn, transmitted the order to his lieutenant to take a party of half a dozen men and surround the cottage, pursue the inhabitants if they had escaped, and at all hazards to bring the girl back.

No sooner had the officer left than the priest drew a chair, and seating himself near his companion, said, in that guarded tone always used by those of his calling when communing on matters of business,

"The affair of Laval is not alone what brought me hither to-night. Learning that death was in the chateau of the recusant Lefevre, I went with the holy emblems of our faith to offer the last services of the Church; they were scornfully rejected, and even words of insult and defiance used toward the highest in authority in the nation."

The cruel spirit glared through the black eyes of the listener, and he clutched the paper he held with a fiercer grasp as he said,

"It is time to deal summarily with that man. He has been too long permitted the free expression of his opinions, and the voice that will rise against the king's authority must be stifled in a dungeon. I will see that it is attended to forthwith."

He would again have sounded the bell, but the monk checked him.

"Leave Lefevre yet a little longer to me. I have spies upon his steps that he can not escape; and I wish to exercise my art in mental torture yet a little while before he falls under the strong arm of the law. Besides, I have another object in view: the intimacy which exists between one of our own flock and the family of Lefevre fills me with unpleasant suspicions. Claude Chastain, the young advocate, is on terms of great friendliness with these heretics; he has been warned, yet he persists in keeping up a secret intercourse with them; and I have considered it expedient to place one about him whose business it is to watch his proceedings and report them to me. I have reason to suspect him of leaning toward the Huguenots, and I caused my agent to present himself to him as a secret follower of the new doctrines. After some pretended objections, and a rigid examination of his testimonials, Chastain employed him. That of itself is suspicious; but I will not condemn him except on the fullest conviction of his guilt. His defection just now would be a severe blow to us, for he is a man of clear sense and sound judgment, and once enlisted in a cause he considers just, he would sooner walk through a fiery furnace than recoil from its support. We must deal gently with him, and, if possible, win him back to the true path."

"Yours is a subtle brain, holy Father, and I submit to the wisdom of your decisions. I leave these men for the present to your management, but remember that my authority is ready to sustain any measures you may deem expedient against them. It was a curious chance that made this Chastain the subject of my thoughts when you came in. This memorial is from him, and must have been written with the belief that some weight would be attached to it as coming from a true son of the Church."

The abbot looked interested, and he held out his hand for the document. After glancing over it he said,

"I have received a similar petition in my ecclesiastical capacity. The interest Chastain takes in this affair only increases my suspicions against him. He sets forth the case of Madame Altenberg and her daughter Eugenia. The mother is a Catholic who, contrary to the established law, married a Huguenot, and lived with him to his death. She conformed to the requirements of her faith, and reared her daughter in its observances. As the offspring of such a forbidden marriage, Eugenia Altenberg is illegitimate, and can not inherit property falling to her from her father. It is asked that this law may be set aside in her favor, that she may heir his estate."

"Which estate is scarcely worth asking for, if I remember the history of this Altenberg rightly," said the magistrate, touching a drawer labeled A, in which the records he referred to were to be found. "His Catholic wife did not save him from the dragonnade and sequestration of his property. The last report of Altenberg reads, 'Ruined—died of chagrin—family cast out on the world.' Why the latter, when the mother and daughter are adherents of our faith?"

"Because the woman deserved punishment for her laxity in not proselyting her husband to the truth. In a matter of such vital importance no true Catholic would have lived in contentment with her renegade husband, with the knowledge that he was walking in the broad road that leadeth to everlasting destruction. No; Madame Altenberg was lukewarm in the cause, and punishment was due to her. As you truly say, the remnant of the estate is not worth claiming; but, since the death of M. Altenberg, a large bequest from a relative engaged in trade in Bordeaux has fallen to him. A half million of livres are at stake, and the widow and her daughter have employed Chastain, as their advocate, to endeavor to secure it for them."

"Ah, I see! But why should this fact inspire you with suspicions against the young man? Do you think these women are also tainted with heresy?"

"Very likely; especially the daughter, who was most devotedly attached to her father, and much under his influence. You know that I obtain minute information concerning the most private affairs of those suspected of leaning toward the heretics, and I know that an attachment exists between Mademoiselle Altenberg and the son of Lefevre. It is opposed by her mother, more from policy than any real objection she may have to the young man."

"What, then, does the woman mean by asking me to bestow on her daughter the right to claim this inheritance, that she may unite herself in marriage with the son of such a race as that of Lefevre?" asked D'Aguesseau, angrily; "and how does that implicate Chastain?"

"I am coming to that, if you will only have patience," replied the priest calmly. "It has long been equally well known to me that Chastain is not only the dearest friend of Gerald Lefevre, but also the lover of his sister. He is interested in the claimant of this property, through his friendship for Colonel Lefevre; hence his application to you. But I have a plan by which the money may come to the heiress, and yet be secured to the Church."

"Ah-h! pray let me hear it."

"While the claim is pending before the ecclesiastical court, Madame Altenberg and her daughter must be required to take up their abode with the Sisters of Mercy, that such heretical notions as they have imbibed from their deceased relative may be thoroughly rooted out. Once within those walls, the mother comes out an orthodox Catholic; the daughter, not at all. In her is vested the greater part of the claim, and she must take the veil, willingly or not, and give the control of this large sum to those who know better how to manage it than an inexperienced girl. Thus a soul will be saved, and a new source of power given to the Church."

"But a thought strikes me, Father. If Mademoiselle Altenberg is not legitimated, this money is forfeited to the state. Why should not the Government profit by it as well as the Church?"

The abbot regarded him steadily, and a slightly scornful smile quivered around his lips.

"Because to deny this claim to one of our own faith will be giving her a plea for going over to the heretics, which I half suspect her of a willingness to do. Grant it, and she dares not make such a movement; refuse, and the money passes into the hands of commissioners in Bordeaux, where the testator died, and neither you nor I gain any benefit from it. Accede to my proposal, and I promise you that the Church shall not forget the son who is careful of her interests."

"But do you believe the girl will ever be wrought on to give up her lover and become a nun?"

"On that score I cherish no doubts. If kindness and persuasion, such as we know how to use, fail to win her to my will, then shall other means be tried. Our resources are infinite; and never yet have I known man or woman who could not, by some method, be brought to submission. Eugenia Altenberg will have no one to inquire too minutely into her fate, should she prove refractory, and the proof that the Church is her heir shall not be wanting."

The magistrate looked on the calm face of the priest as he thus spoke, and even he, hardened in cruelty as he was, shuddered at the picture his fancy conjured up of this helpless girl thus victimized for the sake of her possessions. He said,

"It shall be as you desire; but I trust the girl will meet your wishes without any thing like force becoming necessary."

"It matters not; she will meet them, and that is the most important point," replied the abbot, coolly. "And now let us examine the latest reports from our Jesuit agents scattered among these benighted people."

D'Aguesseau opened a drawer larger than the others, in which many sealed packages had been placed, awaiting his leisure to look over them. The most of these were accurate reports from various members of the order of the Jesuits,

made to the magistrate by the command of their superior, to further the cruel persecutions against the Huguenots. The condition of those they were commissioned to proselyte was faithfully detailed, and the cruel eyes of the two who read them seemed to gloat over the records of suffering and constancy they related.

Many had been brought back to the Romish Church because they had not firmness to bear the tortures inflicted on themselves and all that were dear to them; while the wonder is that, amidst the atrocities that were sanctioned, any could be found strong enough in their faith to maintain their adherence to the Church that lay crushed and bleeding beneath the iron heel of despotism.

At length the priest arose with an expression of satisfaction on his features. He said,

"The end shall sanctify the means. The king will have the satisfaction of bringing back his people to the truth. One faith, one church, one communion, will soon be the law; and the lesson thus taught will be remembered throughout all time as a salutary check on presumption and impiety. Adieu, my son; the night wanes, and I must attend to other business before I sleep."

The abbot passed from the room; and closing the drawers, and carefully locking them, D'Aguesseau rang his bell in a peculiar manner, which was understood by the attendant in waiting, for he came in bearing wine and luxurious food, which he placed before his superior in silence and then retired.

The night was clear and starlit; but the priest cast no glance of love or reverence toward the serene arch bending over earth in loving majesty, as a contrast and a reproach to the turmoil of envy, passion, and destruction on which it looks. Other thoughts were in his scheming brain; to entrap the helpless and unwary into the fangs of that ruthless power of which he was a most fitting agent, seemed the sole aim of his existence, and in so doing he really believed he was serving the cause of God.

Naturally of a stern, unyielding temper, with nerves of steel and will of iron, intolerance was his birth-right, and fanaticism his inheritance. Bred in the strictest dogmas of the Church, education had completely identified his interests and his faith with her prosperity. To die beyond its pale was, in his belief, to perish everlastingly; and better was it for the heretic to suffer earthly tortures than lie under the eternal ban of Almighty wrath.

But when persecution failed to wring a recantation from the victim; when strength was given to resist, even to the last extremity, then all the deadly hostility of his nature was aroused, and he believed it to be the prerogative of the Church to smite, slay, and utterly exterminate, even as the Israelites of old were commissioned to destroy their enemies.

The blood-stained chronicles of the Old Testament were his favorite reading; and from them he drew arguments to sustain the course of Louis against the subjects he was bound by every law, both human and divine, to protect.

He moved with quick and cautious steps, with bowed head; but his darkly-glancing eyes saw every thing around him. He met several persons; and even by the dim light he easily recognized the Protestants by their avoidance of his dark-robed form, and by a certain expression of listless depression, which, to his observant and nicely-tuned ear, even their tread upon the pavement indicated.

In the rear of the cathedral lay the buildings appropriated to the clergy. These were massive in structure, and planned with attention to both taste and comfort. Extensive grounds surrounded them, inclosed by a high brick wall; to these the priest gained access by means of a key he carried with him which opened a small private door.

Within was found the pleasant shadow of trees, the odor of flowers, and the murmur of falling water from fountains used to irrigate the shrubbery. An open colonnade, supported by Corinthian pillars, extended the whole length of the building on the side next the garden; and after passing through this without encountering any one, the abbot en-

tered a room of fair proportions fitted up as a library—for his order cultivates learning and literature more than any other in the Romish Church.

Massive book-cases, grotesquely carved, were filled with antique tomes, many of them highly illuminated and of almost priceless value. A lamp of silver, of an exquisite arabesque pattern, shed a soft light throughout the room; and beneath its brightest rays was placed a mosaic table, a present from the Pope, and a specimen of the rarest work of the kind which had then been produced in Italy. An open missal, the margin of which was enriched with gems, lay upon it, and the rosary that rested beside it was of emeralds of the purest water, which flashed back the flickering rays of light as the lamp swung to and fro in the night breeze.

Several pictures of rare merit hung on the walls—one of the Virgin Mary, with all the sensuous beauty given to her by many of the old masters, looked out from the canvas almost like a thing of life. A painting of Christ on the Cross, just as the spirit has departed, hung beside this; and the utter lifelessness expressed in every relaxed limb, in the pale sinking of the features, showed the consummate skill of the artist. A head of Christ crowned with thorns, sculptured in bass-relief, occupied a niche beside a door leading into a small dormitory, which contained nothing save a pallet and crucifix, with a skull and cross-bones placed beneath it—grim reminders of the mortality of him who offered his devotions there.

The abbot crossed himself, and bowed his head as he passed each one of these sacred symbols, and then without pausing, walked toward a portion of the wall which to all appearance was like the rest. He touched a spring that was skillfully concealed, and the panel noiselessly opened, revealing an interior apartment, with windows that looked out on the pleasant yard beneath. This retreat was fitted up with all the luxury known at that period; and the King of France himself was not surrounded by a greater display

of taste and elegance than was found in the adornments of this priestly refuge from the cares of life.

The walls were covered with pictures representing the beautiful women of the Bible; and the painters had certainly imagined among them every type of loveliness which the female form assumes. From the fair-haired daughters of the North to the dusky beauty of the Tropics, all were there; and but for the names with which they were labeled, the beholder would scarcely have recognized them as representatives of the Hebrew race.

A passionate admirer of beauty in all its varied forms, Father Antoine consoled himself for his outward asceticism by surrounding himself in his hours of relaxation with shapes of loveliness, which he appreciated as the intellectual and solitary recluse, shut out from congenial companionship, appreciates his books. They are silent friends to which he may turn as inclination leads him; and the priest could gaze on each pictured form without fear of caprice or coquetry. The fair beauty could not frown and utter cutting words as he turned toward a rival: all smiled alike on him, and he was content. A connoisseur in art, he knew that many among them were gems; and his critical eye never wearied in discovering new beauties in these still representatives of living, breathing, passionate life.

Before several of them, lamps filled with perfumed oil burned, and the air of the room was heavy with its odor. The abbot unclosed a window, and the cool gush of night air swept through the room, causing the light to flicker until the eyes of the pictures seemed to move with life. He half smiled as he stood before a painting of Miriam holding her symbols high in the air as if ready to strike up the exulting strain which celebrated the crossing of her people through the Red Sea.

"Beautiful and strong soul!" he muttered; "had I met your counterpart, my heart might have gone forth to claim its mate; but no woman of mortal mould have I yet seen who caused me for one moment to regret my vow of celib-

acy. Lovely phantoms! creatures of impulse given to man for his torment, I repudiate ye all, though I worship the outward garb of loveliness with which the Creator has invested so many of ye."

He turned to the next picture. It represented a fair girl with golden hair, and eyes of such soft and dreamy beauty as might stir the fancy of an anchorite. This was labeled Jephthah's daughter, and long and earnest was the gaze that dwelt upon it. He turned away with a half sigh as he muttered,

"If those were living eyes, and looked thus into mine, I might be tempted to forget that I have repudiated every human emotion, save devotion to the cause of my only bride, the true Church of the living God."

At that moment the sounds of music came floating on the night breeze, and the magnificent midnight mass was chanted by a choir of trained voices to the accompaniment of the deep-toned organ. It reverberated with solemn distinctness throughout the building, and the air without seemed tremulous with the melody of the lofty strain. As its last echo died away, the abbot laid aside his coarse robe of serge and replaced it with one of silk of the softest and finest texture. He then drew toward him a small table, and removing the napkin with which it was covered, wine and daintily-prepared viands were before him.

Of these he partook with the gusto of an epicure, for the abbot, as superior of his order, held from his spiritual head a perpetual indulgence, purchased by certain concessions to the Holy See, to enjoy every pleasure his station permitted, provided the outward decorum of the Church was not violated. When this practice of selling indulgences was brought forward by the Huguenots as an objection to the Church from which they had seceded, the Dominican had the hardihood to use the words of Christ himself in its defense—"To the pure in heart all things are pure," and added, that among the true followers of St. Peter no indulgence from holy Mother Church can be abused. They who

make evil uses of them are the followers of anti-Christ. The Reformers might have retorted with truth, that of such, then, must be the majority of their people; but prudence stifled the response.

The priest sunk back in his luxurious chair, rapt in a dreamy reverie, in which the images of beauty that smiled down on him were mingled with phantoms of blood, tortures, and suffering, that formed a hideous contrast to each other. In the silence of that lonely room, with the sacred melody so lately breathing around him still ringing in his ears, he planned new persecutions for the renegades from his faith, while he awaited the appearance of an emissary who would place new victims within his insatiate grasp.

At length he arose, walked impatiently to and fro, and then returned to the library. As he entered, the figure of a man appeared at the door, and Ferron, the clerk of Claude Chastain, bowed with cringing servility before him.

"Ah! I have waited for you long," was the impatient greeting he received. "Now you have come, I trust you have something worth hearkening to to reveal.

"You are right, holy Father. I have much to relate which it is important you should know. But until a few moments since I could not leave the house of my master without danger of suspicion. I came at the earliest moment possible."

"Enough—no more excuses, but to the point. What has occurred to throw new light on my suspicions?"

"Much that may tend to justify them."

Ferron then gave a brief account of the arrival of M. Lecroix—his visit in company with Chastain to the chateau, and the assistance rendered by them in burying Madame Lefevre.

The abbot interrupted him impatiently—

"And all this you permitted to go on? Nay, assisted in without informing me?"

"I did the best I could, holy Father," replied the spy,

humbly; "and if you will listen to me yet a few moments, you will find that I have done all that was possible under the circumstances."

"Go on," was the brief response, and Ferron obeyed promptly, for he knew every expression of that stern face too well not to tremble before the one it now wore.

"I was left below to watch the coffin of Madame Lefevre, and I went at once with your orders to the dragoons in the chateau. I had not time to follow them to the tower and observe what they did there, for just as I returned from the other errand my master came down to see if all was safe. Soon afterward they brought down the corpse, and we went at once to bury it. I then returned to the tower with the old man and his daughter, but I took good care not to go up with them. I was to return home to help M. Lecroix to get safely off."

"And did you dare do this last?" asked the abbot, sternly. "I would this hour give my right hand to have that contumacious heretic in my power, that he may be made an example to strike terror into the mistaken followers of his doctrines."

The informer smiled grimly.

"If I had done a thing so contrary to your wishes, I should not have dared to present myself before you, Father. I informed the sergeant at the chateau, Pierre Lefond, that at one o'clock to-night this old man, alone and helpless, will pass by a certain road leading into the hills; and if he is captured, a large reward will be given to the person who brings him to your reverence, besides granting him a plenary indulgence as long as he may wish it. You know the man, and he will not fail when money is to be gained by the service. You may reckon on having the old heretic in your power before daylight. As to the share my master had in all this, I believe it arose from friendship for these people, and no falling away from the faith. He has a good heart this M. Chastain, and in these uncertain times he says as little as may be about his religious belief. I like his pru-

dence, and I hope your reverence will not be hard on him for assisting old friends at such a time."

"How came Chastain to know of this old man's presence in Nismes, and to aid him in getting away?"

"That I do not know. M. Lecroix joined us as we left the house, and I knew him at once, for I have sometimes attended the services of the heretics as a looker on. You know there is a law requiring good Catholics to do so, that their preachers be restrained from uttering seditious doctrines. I believe that M. Lefevre found means to summon the old pastor to officiate at his wife's funeral, and as M. Chastain was the only friend he had who could protect him, he induced him to do so."

"Even that is a deadly fault; but it is well for Chastain that 'tis no worse. You have done well, Ferron; I commend your zeal, but it is necessary that you keep a stricter watch upon your employer. I must ascertain his true failings toward the Reformers. Here is your reward; this sum shall be doubled if the archheretic is in my power within twelve hours."

Ferron took the gold the priest offered, and bowing with deep respect, he uttered many thanks and assurances of fidelity, and retired.

CHAPTER VI

WITH touching thanks for his assistance in paying the last tribute of respect to the remains of their lost one, M. Lefevre and his daughter bade adieu to the treacherous clerk of Chastian. Ferron received them with an air of stolid indifference, and took his departure so soon as he had struck a light for them.

Irene held the dim lamp and preceded her father, who feebly ascended the steps as if physical strength and mental resolution were alike prostrated. It was a touching spectacle to behold the uncertain light flickering over the white hairs and wrinkled brow of him who had so lately dedicated the remainder of his days to a service which must inevitably lead to privation, persecution, perhaps death. As Irene beheld these silent evidences of suffering, she paused until he stood on the step beside her, and then said,

"Let me assist you, father. Lean on my arm; you are worn out with your long vigils."

"The space is scarcely wide enough," he answered. "It was only a momentary feeling of weariness that overcame me. My soul rebelled against its loneliness now she is gone, and I forgot my dependence on Him 'who doeth all things well.' I do not suffer from bodily exhaustion, my daughter; I really am better able to afford assistance to you than you are to render it to me," and he gazed pityingly upon the pale cheeks to which even exercise had brought no color.

"Oh, I am young and strong, father. Endurance should be familiar to me, for I have learned it in a school that teaches stern lessons."

He sighed heavily, and the two toiled slowly up the winding ascent in the perpendicular wall, the jagged and damp

surface of which came every moment in contact with their persons.

At length the panel was reached, the spring touched, and by its opening a scene revealed that made both father and daughter recoil. Irene stifled the cry which arose to her lips; it died away in a choking sob of anguish; while M. Lefevre with renewed strength bounded through the aperture, and stood amidst the ruins of the few sacred relics that still remained to him.

The portrait of his wife was removed from its frame, and after being mutilated in such a manner as to destroy every vestige of beauty, was cut in strips and scattered on the floor. Secret recesses, which had been ingeniously contrived in the wall for the concealment of prohibited books and papers of importance, were lying open, with their contents torn into small fragments. The few articles of furniture had been removed, and in the centre of the apartment stood a frame of wood large enough to receive the body of a man, and beside it lay a coil of rope, evidently intended for use.

The young girl glanced with horror from these to her father; for she instinctively divined their purpose, and the words by which she would have urged him to fly died away on her lips, as she heard sounds of stifled laughter from the adjoining apartment, and knew that their proceedings were watched.

All the energy and composure of M. Lefevre seemed to have returned at once. He stooped and picked up some of the fragments of writing.

"The title deeds to my estate," he calmly said. "Ah well, I trust that I and mine have an inheritance laid up in heaven of more worth than this poor earthly one, which my enemies are so anxious to appropriate. My beloved books, too, have shared the same fate; it is as well, perhaps, for I could not have carried them with me in my wanderings, and their teachings are treasured in my heart. My daughter, do not look so terrified. Can not God protect his own?"

Irene replied by pointing to the frame, and her father responded with melancholy dignity,

"These men may inflict indignities upon me—perhaps even torture me, as they have many others—but they shall never find that I shrink before them. He, in whose cause I suffer, will give me strength to bear the burden of the cross, sustained by himself amidst revilings and insult."

"You old canting hypocrite!" exclaimed a rough voice, as the door which led into the body of the mansion was thrown rudely open, "we'll see if we can't make you change your tune before we are done with you." And eight of the most brutal among the soldiers stationed in the chateau entered the tower, carrying their arms with them.

"Your day of grace is past, old fellow; and, at last, we're permitted to work our will on your heretical body until the truths of the Church may be acknowledged as a balm to your wounds."

Irene instinctively threw herself before her father, as if her presence must be a protection to him, even amidst these drunken and brutalized men. Lefevre clasped her to his breast in anguish.

"Oh, my child, my child! in this hour even the protection of your Romish uncle would be welcome. I can bear all myself; but you—you will be unprotected, and at the mercy of these wretches."

"I do not fear them, father, except on your account. Their captain would severely punish them for any outrage toward me."

She then turned to the men, and asked, with dignified calmness,

"Is Captain Delmont aware of this invasion of our privacy?"

"The orders came from the Intendant, and were as good as signed by Father Antoine," replied the same man who had before spoken. "I have good warrant for what I am about to do, mademoiselle?"

"And what is your purpose?" she faintly asked.

"To make a proselyte, by fair means or foul. We've played the fool long enough here already, and, since the old fellow is too hard-headed to mind what's gone before, we're going to try what virtue there is in a little bodily suffering."

"Listen to me," pleaded Irene; but her entreaties were summarily ended at a sign from the ringleader. A dragoon, who had hitherto stood in the shadow of the door, advanced quickly and threw a shawl over her head. Her clinging arms were loosened from her father's form, who was at the same time held back by the firm grasp of two powerful soldiers.

Irene was borne from the tower, and the two men lifted the struggling form of M. Lefevre and placed it upon the frame before alluded to. The coil of rope was then used to fasten him securely, and tightened with such severity as to produce the most exquisite suffering. He uttered no complaint, for he saw that those commissioned to commit this outrage had been carefully selected from the most brutalized portion of the band stationed in the chateau. He resigned himself to the thought of death, and he prayed fervently for strength to meet its approach with firmness; but it was with difficulty he repressed a cry of anguish, as the uncertain fate of his beloved child pressed upon him. He forced himself to speak to his tormentors, to entreat them to inform him whither she had been removed.

Jeers and taunts were the only replies he received, and they drowned his words by singing a loud song, while they joined hands and danced around his couch, stamping and shouting in chorus. The impeded circulation soon produced physical torture which tasked all the strong energies of Lefevre's soul to conceal. His features were swollen and purple, and his parched lips could scarcely whisper the words that came to them. He feebly murmured,

"Be merciful to me, O God! for my soul trusteth in thee. Under the shadow of thy wings shall be my refuge, until this tyranny be overpast."

"Hear the old reprobate," said one of the men, with a coarse laugh. "He calls on God, just as if he expects the

prayers of a heretic to be heard. Hark ye, old fellow ; the good man up yonder has enough children of his own to listen to, without being troubled by such as you. You needn't ask *Him* for help, because he has given his power down here to the Pope, and his sacred majesty, the king ; and they don't see no good in the praying of any heretic like you. Come back to the faith, and then there'll be some use in asking the Holy Virgin to intercede for you."

He paused, as if for a reply, and there was a momentary quiet among his tormentors to hear what the victim would say. Lefevre lay silent, and the leader thrust his sword in his arm until blood followed the wound, as he said,

"Why don't you speak ? I'm not used to being left without an answer from such as you."

The old man turned his eyes from the brutal being, flushed with intoxication, into whose power he had fallen, and at the rudely enforced command his lips unclosed.

"To you, and such as you, I have nothing to say. In God have I put my trust ; I will not be afraid what man can do unto me."

"You wont, ha ? Well, we'll see to that. If your obstinate old soul don't quake in your body before I'm done with you, my name's not Raoul."

"Is your captain aware of what is passing here ?" asked the sufferer.

"It's no matter whether he is or no. I have higher authority than his for what I'm doing. As to the captain, he is too busy making love to your daughter to care about what is happening here."

A gleam of comfort came to the unhappy father's heart at this insinuation. He said,

"My child is then under Delmont's care ? He is a soldier, and a man of honor ; he will surely protect her from harm."

"That's as it may be. The captain mayn't have the power, for he's not the greatest man in these parts. He acts under orders as we all do, and *your* daughter's not likely to have much ceremony shown toward her."

The father groaned and closed his eyes; his lips moved as if in prayer for his helpless one, but he said no more. After a pause, in which to rest themselves, Raoul tightened the cords that bound Lefevre's limbs, until the stricture almost forced from him a cry of agony.

"Boys," he said, "we're only wasting time; this man will never give in for such child's play. The blood is forced to his head until the veins are nearly bursting; now he is in a fit state to enjoy a concert. Bring in the music; it will ring a grand peal through his brain."

A chorus of laughter arose at this, and four of the men went out. They soon returned with a drum, horn, and a triangle, on which they commenced a hideous uproar close beside the prisoner. His head already throbbed to bursting, and the strong, physical frame was rapidly succumbing beneath the suffering he endured; for age and sorrow had made many inroads on the strength of the body, but the firm soul remained unshaken. He endeavored to fix his thoughts on the agony of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane; on his sufferings upon the cross, and broken words of supplication went up to the throne of the Omnipotent, for power to endure any degree of torture sooner than betray the cause to which his life had been devoted.

The noise, the sufferings of his body, produced fever, and the horror came upon him that delirium might ensue, and in its paroxysms he might utter such words as no humiliation and repentance could, in his estimation, wash away. Amidst this new anguish, the physical pain, the wild uproar sounding in his ears, were scarcely heeded. A mental power to resist them seemed bestowed on him which was incomprehensible to himself. He felt that God was with him, sustaining his courage and endurance amidst all the devices of his enemies to overpower them.

Another hour passed thus, and Raoul again approached him and felt his pulse. M. Lefevre lay passive, though perfectly sensible.

"Enough is enough, I reckon, old fellow. Won't you

sign the abjuration of your heresies now? You're half maddened by the uproar by this time, and ready to say any thing I choose to dictate."

The exhausted sufferer murmured,

"No—no, with my latest breath will I cling to my faith. Oh, Father! thou canst 'save us from our enemies, and put them to confusion that hate us. Arise and help us, and deliver us, for thy mercy's sake.'"

"It's my opinion that you had better do what will enable you to arise yourself," said the soldier, brutally. "I see it's no use trying bodily suffering; the old wretch will die sooner than give up. There is something else to be done that'll come nearer to his stubborn soul. Come, boys, let's bring back the numbed senses, that he may feel more keenly what's coming next."

By this time some relief to M. Lefevre was necessary to prevent that leaden apathy from overcoming him, which must result from a long-continued interruption of the natural circulation of the blood. The cords were loosened, water was given him, and a portion poured upon his head in a cooling shower. The swollen limbs were rubbed a few moments, and he sat up, with his senses restored to all their natural activity.

This was not done in silence, but amidst jeers and insults which we forbear to repeat; for each one of the band seemed to exercise his ingenuity in endeavoring to surpass his companions in their cruel pastime. M. Lefevre scarcely heard them; he was trying to fortify his soul for what might follow, for his knowledge of the outrages practiced against the followers of his faith gave him a dim foreshadowing of a trial he shuddered to contemplate even in imagination.

"Any anguish but that," he fervently prayed; but his supplications were interrupted by Raoul, who tauntingly said,

"You thought you were sly enough to put away your dead to-night without letting any of us be the wiser for it. But I'm going to prove to you that you are not so clever as you thought you were."

The heart of the persecuted man shrank and quivered as if a deadly thrust had been aimed at it, and he trembled in every nerve. Insult to those hallowed remains completely overcame him, and he said,

"Are you men with mothers—with sisters of your own, and yet dare to practice such indignities toward a woman who never harmed you? If you have hearts in your bosoms, forbear."

There was a tone of commanding and dignified pathos in his voice which must have appealed to natures less hardened than these; but the men around him had been permitted to exercise their cruel license until they looked upon the Huguenots as their rightful prey, and seemed to forget that the tie of a common humanity should unite all mankind in one brotherhood.

"Ah-h—so you're coming round, are you? I thought we'd find something that would make you wince. If you have such reverence for the memory of your wife, you will not refuse to save her body from such a resurrection as we can give it? Just sign this paper now, that was sent to me by Father Antoine, and it will spare you any further torment."

Again the declaration of abjuration was presented; but he covered his face with his hands as he motioned it away, that the wretches around him should not behold the bitter struggle that shook his soul. This had been his deepest dread; and his spirit died within him at the thought of that sacred form, on which Death had laid his hallowing touch, torn from its resting-place, and desecrated by the insults of this sacrilegious and unscrupulous set of demons. For a few brief moments he felt as if he could renounce every earthly duty, every hope in the future, to save her from such indignity; but when the first bitterness of the struggle was past he resigned himself even to this, and removing his hands he gazed calmly on the flushed faces before him.

"Take away your abjuration," he said, in a firm tone; "I will perish by slow torture sooner than sign it. My

Father in heaven is 'my defense and my shield,' and my trust shall be in his word, 'though ye persecute and slay me.'"

The emotion he had manifested had awakened in his tormentors the hope that he was about to yield, and embrace the doctrines which were enforced in so *Christianlike* a manner, and this defiance aroused all their ferocity with renewed violence. Some of them proposed to hang him up to the wall by his hair, while they used pincers to tear the flesh from his body in minute fragments, that the most exquisite suffering might be produced; others prepared bundles of straw, which they dampened in such a manner as to make them burn slowly, that they might suffocate him with the fumes of the smoke, while the flame from them would be only sufficient to scorch his body. To these Raoul replied,

"All in good time, boys; but for to-night he's had about as much of this kind of fun as he can bear. I wouldn't like to kill him outright, even at the bidding of the holy Father, lest the captain should bring me to an account for it. This heretic will be given over to us to do our will with, but not just yet. We have had patience with him a long time; don't be in too great a hurry to get rid of him, until we have consumed and destroyed every thing belonging to him.

"For my part, I think we have pretty well done that," said a discontented voice. "We have had the best, and now the leavings are only to be found; we had better make an end here, and let those above us find some new place for us to settle down in and consume, as the locusts of Egypt are said to do."

"You are never satisfied, Etienne," replied Raoul, "but are always for changing quarters. I know more than you do of the will of our superiors, and you had better do as I bid you. Go and see if the boys are coming."

The dragoon obeyed with a surly mutter, and Raoul turned toward the pallid form that rested helplessly against the wooden frame on which he had been placed. The sufferings of the two past hours seemed to have added years to

the age of M. Lefevre. His features were white and sunken, and deep, livid circles were around his eyes; but an unshaken spirit shone from the deep setting of the expressive orbs, and his lips were closed with a firmness which showed the power of resistance still to be found in that strong soul which had not vainly aspired to sustain the cause of his Master. He had nerved himself for what was to follow, and he was resolute to conceal the anguish of his lacerated heart from these ruthless agents of power.

A few more hours, and in all probability his trials would be ended; and he sought to steel his soul to the insults he knew would be offered to the dead, by the thought that the spirit was safe in heaven, and what mattered it how the poor forsaken tenement fared? But human feeling would not thus be crushed; and as he heard feet approaching, with that sound which indicates the bearing of a heavy burden, every step smote upon his heart with a vital pang, keener than would have been the stab of a dagger.

A momentary faintness overcame him, and he closed his eyes as the terrible procession entered the tower; but a feeling he could not repress compelled him to open them again. He looked up and beheld his dead wife, held erect before him by two soldiers, who swayed the body to and fro, as they brutally cried out,

"Why don't you speak to the old lady, you miserable heretic? Don't you see she is bowing to you with all her might?"

At a glance Lefevre saw that the shroud was soiled and torn in several places, and the pale hands, which clung together in that icy embrace which only dissolution may sever, were scratched as if dragged through the bushes. At this sight his fainting soul was roused within him. All the strength of his mature manhood seemed to return to him. He sprang up, clasped the rigid form to his breast with one arm, and with the other dealt a sweeping blow to the two soldiers, which sent them reeling to the floor.

They arose with angry execrations, and sprang toward

him with cries of fury. A blow on the head deprived Lefevre of consciousness, and but for the interference of Raoul they would soon have ended the scene by his murder. With a refinement in cruelty, the leader insisted that a respite should be afforded the victim to enable him to gather strength for new tortures. On the next, and each succeeding day, they might renew their persecutions, until, at length, worn out with protracted suffering, the hapless man would re-enter the Romish Church or yield up an existence that was but a torment to him.

The dragoons listened to his words, and gloated over his his promises, with ferocious scowls toward the senseless sufferer, who was again bound to the frame, with his dead wife laid so closely beside him that her cold cheek touched his own. A lamp was then so placed as to throw the glare upon the still, white face, which wore that ineffable impress of calmness and peace stamped upon the features of those who die in the serene hope of immortality. Then a few drops of wine were forced between the lips of Lefevre to restore him to consciousness, that he might comprehend the position in which they left him.

Certain that the victim, thus secured, could not escape, and wearied with their cruel sport, the soldiers then retired to their own portion of the chateau and threw themselves down to sleep.

Gradually consciousness returned to M. Lefevre, and he unclosed his eyes to behold the face he so loved lying close beside his own. He contemplated it tenderly for many moments, and then his parched lips unclosed to mutter words of endearment.

"My angel wife, they thought to unnerve me by placing you here. Ah, even in death thou art inexpressibly dear to me! Thy presence is a holy balm, though it was designed as an insult and a horror to me. Oh, love, love can overcome death!"

He struggled to release his hands from confinement, that he might restore himself to freedom, but his captors had too

securely tied him. His efforts seemed only to tighten the bonds, already sufficient to produce intense suffering.

Exhausted by his efforts, he lay still for many moments, and delirious fancies began to crowd through his brain. The days of his youth passed before him; the years of his happy married life, happy in defiance of the clouded and uncertain future, were in fancy lived over again. He imagined his living wife beside him, and he poured forth words of vivid eloquence, portraying his love for her and for their children; cherished hopes, wild dreams, and unwavering purposes, were unfolded. Then, with a sudden revulsion, the whole dreary reality came home to him, and with an effort of almost superhuman strength he loosened the cord that bound his right hand to the frame.

On raising it, M. Lefevre found that he could reach the lamp that stood above his head near enough to burn the ligament that secured his wrist. Then his hand would be free to use. In so doing, the flame scorched his flesh and burned the sleeve of his coat to a crisp, but he held it with firm will until the rope was sufficiently charred to be easily severed with his teeth.

The hand and arm were badly blistered, but, in the excitement of the moment, that was unheeded. He remembered that in the breast of his coat was a small knife, which, if found, would now do him good service. The cords were laced across his breast in such a manner as at first to baffle him, but renewed effort brought success at last; and, with a feeling of exultation that almost caused him to shout aloud, he succeeded in grasping the little instrument, which, for him, might be made to accomplish so much.

It was but the work of a moment to sever the cords that bound him, and once more he stood erect, though it was with a whirling brain and tottering limbs. He rubbed them to renew the impeded circulation, and, as the numbness left them, he looked around the room to see what was there which could serve the purpose that was rapidly developing in his mind.

A bottle half filled with wine, and a loaf of bread, had been accidentally left on the floor near him. He seized them and ate and drank, that strength might return to perform what lay before him. Then he arose, and taking the lamp, went cautiously into the deserted rooms which lay between the tower and the quarters of the soldiers. All was vacant and still, and he closed the last door with care, by placing a ponderous iron bar across it to prevent ingress from that side.

M. Lefevre then returned to the tower, placed the body of his wife with tender care upon the rude frame from which he removed the cords that had bound himself. He collected every thing combustible he could find, and built up a kind of funeral pyre around her. In this his purpose was much facilitated by the bundles of dry hay the dragoons had brought for a very different use. This completed, he gathered up a quantity of the same combustible material and again went into the suite of vacant rooms beyond. The hay wisps were thrust where they would soonest produce the destruction designed by him, and then lighted with as firm a hand and unmoved a face as if some festive illumination only was intended.

He paused to witness the success of his efforts, and a wild smile of triumph lighted up his features as he beheld the flames curling around the aged wood-work, and darting in vivid flashes from rafter to rafter as if eager to accomplish their delegated task. He sternly said,

"Since I and mine can no longer be sheltered beneath these walls, they shall not remain as a home for the scoffer and oppressor to hold his revels in."

He passed out again, closing every door behind him, and re-entered the tower. He approached the couch, and kneeling beside it, invoked the lifeless image it contained:

"A glorious funeral pyre shalt thou have, oh my beloved! Only by this means can I save thee from further insult. Thy home is left desolate without thee, oh life of my life! and it is the will of Heaven that it shall perish with thee.

Praise be to his name that he has given me the power, and my right hand the cunning to accomplish this."

Again he kissed the cold brow and lips. Then, with an expression of saddened awe, he arose, lifted the lamp, and lighted the pile. Without one backward look at what he knew would be so terrible to him, M. Lefevre walked straight to the sliding door, passed through, and closed it. With unfaltering steps he descended the narrow stairs, nerved by a power he could not comprehend. Deep down in his soul lay a feeling of utter desperation and despair, which made him almost a mechanical agent in carrying out the purpose of his strong will.

If he could have laid down his life without crime and have gone to his award, he would gladly have perished in the flames he heard already crackling and roaring behind him. But he felt that the work decreed to him was not yet accomplished; he must live for that, and in his own good time the All Father would take him to the enjoyment of that "peace which remaineth to the children of God"—the peace he so longed for, amidst the struggle and turmoil of his unhappy lot.

As M. Lefevre approached the bottom of the stairs he extinguished his lamp and moved with caution, lest a sentinel might be there on watch who might intercept him. Just at the outlet the bricks in the interior of the wall had mouldered and fallen away, leaving a space barely large enough for a man to stand on one side without being detected. The fugitive stepped into this, and stood with bent head listening for a movement without. Hearing nothing, he was about to stoop and creep through the opening, when it was suddenly darkened, and a voice said, in a muttering tone,

"The whole place is ablaze; and I believe the old heretic has been claimed by the devil before his time."

He scrambled through the opening, brushing unconsciously by M. Lefevre, who held his breath lest his presence might be betrayed. He heard the soldier stumbling up the stairs, and lost no time in making his own escape.

With a feeling almost of exultation at having baffled his enemies, he stepped forth on the greensward with a sense of momentary freedom at least. Long lines of light, from the loop-holes in the tower, lit up the forest, and were reflected in rippling jets of flame in the waters of the fountain, which cast its spray in the garden at such an angle as to receive a bright glare upon it.

By this lurid illumination M. Lefevre hurried through a pathway which he knew led to an eminence from which he could behold the destruction of his chateau; and there was a savage pleasure in the thought that the home of his fathers would never more be a shelter for the enemies of the faith in whose defense he was ready to perish, if such was the final decree of Heaven.

He reached the desired spot: on two sides it was screened by low undergrowth, but on that next the burning house the sward lay smooth and even, only shadowed by the tall forest-trees, whose branches interlaced so high above the straight stems that they offered little interruption to the view. Already the flames were bursting from every window; the tower was wrapped in a billowy cloud of smoke and red flakes of fire, that surged and swept around it as if greedy of their prey.

The distant mountain peaks had caught the glow, and they too seemed ready to burst into a conflagration which might scorch and destroy the hapless valley, so long made the scene of cruelties that seemed to call for some signal retribution from Heaven. M. Lefevre waved his hand with an expression of sombre dignity toward the burning pile, and, in tones of deep feeling, said,

"Forgive me, O Lord, for thou hast said 'Vengeance is mine, and I will repay;' but my bursting heart must find vent in hard and bitter words. Let thy consuming curse come upon those men, falsely claiming to be thy ministers on earth, who shut out light from the oppressed heart, bring desolation where unity and brotherly love once dwelt, and drive forth those who seek to do thy will into

the wilderness, making their homes a desolation in the land."

At this moment a wilder burst of flame shot upward from the tower, the smoke rolled partially away, and the roof, after sending forth spiral tongues of dazzling brilliancy, fell in with a surging sweep, that took with it a portion of the outer wall.

At this sight the frame of the strong man shrunk and quivered as if in an ague, and he sat down on the grass with cold drops bursting from his brow, while a faint sickness, as of death, overcame him. It seemed to him that the beloved form that went down to nothingness with that crash, must yet have power to feel all the agonies the awful winding sheet his hand had bestowed upon her could inflict; and the madness of the thought, momentary as it was, inflicted a keener pang than all that had gone before. His strength completely deserted him, and he wept with almost the hysterical passion of a woman.

Those tears relaxed the intense strain of his faculties, and saved him from the loss of reason; for the sufferings of the past hours caused the balance of his firm mind to totter fearfully, as he sat thus alone and wretched in the midnight forest, and watched the destruction of the walls which had once echoed with the happy laughter of his broken household.

The first fierceness of his agony passed away, and he again spoke,

"My son—my son, where are you now, that you are not here to defend your helpless sister—to sustain your old father in this sore strait? Alas! your blood is freely shed in the service of that cruel king who thus causes his faithful servants to be hunted like wild beasts of the forest."

At length the soldiers in the chateau seemed aroused to a sense of their danger, for wild cries and shouts came at intervals on the night breeze. The fire had spread to their portion of the building; but it was then impossible to save it. It was as much as those who were aroused in time

could do to rescue their drunken comrades from the falling ruins.

With the superstition of the age they readily adopted the belief that the crimes of the heretic owner had brought down on him the signal vengeance of Heaven, and that flames lighted from the Tartarus they believed to be his inevitable portion, had been commissioned to do their duty in giving him a foretaste of the everlasting torments prepared for those who doubt the infallibility of the Mother Church. They huddled together, and, with awed faces, watched the devastations of the fire, without making any effort to stay its progress.

This belief was fortunate for M. Lefevre, as it prevented them from seeking him in the woodland, and gave him a chance to escape to the protection of friends who might conceal him until he could reclaim his daughter, and join some one of the numerous bands of emigrants daily leaving the fated land of his birth. That was now his only hope; and, among those expatriated for conscience' sake, he would exercise his new vocation as an expounder of the true doctrines taught by the Bible.

M. Lefevre sat in his retreat and watched each portion of the chateau fall in, until the whole became one mass of smouldering, glowing ruin. While the conflagration raged with greatest violence he beheld what impressed him yet more sorrowfully, because, in the excited state of his mind, it seemed to him a type of the wrongs that were permitted toward his persecuted sect. Many doves built in the eaves of the ancient mansion, and when the heat drove them from their nests they fluttered around in wild affright, and then mounted high in the air, as if instinctively endeavoring to escape from the threatened danger by reaching a purer atmosphere. Blinded by the smoke, and scorched by the blasting vapors that poured upward, they circled above them—each circle growing narrower and narrower until they plunged in the sea of fire and were seen no more.

"Thus, thus is the spirit of God quenched in the fires of

fanaticism on earth," he murmured; and covering his face with his hands, he leaned against a tree in utter exhaustion. The exertions of the past hours had completely overcome him, and he felt that he no longer possessed strength to seek an asylum, even if he had not shrunk from the thought of compromising the few friends he could claim by asking one from them.

He was fast sinking into that state of apathetic calmness which ever succeeds overwrought emotions, when the quick tread of approaching footsteps came to his ear. The recollection of all he had endured that night from the violence of the soldiers came back to him, and roused him to the necessity of concealment. He cowered behind the underwood, and peered anxiously forth to see who approached.

The dying gleams of the conflagration yet lighted up the forest with sufficient distinctness to recognize friend or foe, and M. Lefevre beheld Claude Chastain, with disordered dress and features set in that fixed white expression which betrays the depth of agony struggling in a strong soul. This was the first elevation from which Chastain could obtain a distinct view of the destruction below, and there was a wild tone of anguish in his strained voice as he exclaimed,

"My God, my God, it is the chateau! My Irene, my bride, my love; oh, what has become of thee!"

He would have rushed away, but a sudden dizziness caused him to reel as if struck by a fatal blow; and before he recovered a pale phantom stood before him, with torn and scorched garments and silvery hair waving in the damp night wind.

"M. Lefevre!" he exclaimed, with a rapid glance around, "where is your daughter? Where, where is Irene—my Irene?"

"Gone—torn from me by those miscreants who were quartered on me."

Chastain clasped his hands despairingly, and his strong frame shook with emotion. He hoarsely said,

"I must seek her at once. As the wife of a man who is considered as one of themselves, she shall be claimed and

restored to me. I must save her from the power of those miscreants, at any risk to myself."

Lefevre laid his hand upon his arm and arrested him as he would have moved away.

"Claude, it is many hours since my daughter was torn from my side, and I was given over to the ruthless barbarities of those who have so long devoured my substance. The abbot of the Dominicans, I have no doubt, instigated the whole proceeding. I believe that my daughter will be protected from wrong, as the niece of so conspicuous a Catholic as the *Sieur de Montour*, and as a hoped-for proselyte in the future. You will but ruin yourself by betraying what has occurred to-night."

"But it will be base cowardice to fail her, when she has every claim both upon my heart and honor," said the young man, passionately.

"My son, to serve *Irene* effectually you must use the wiliness of the serpent, otherwise the result will be that we shall all fall into the power of this remorseless priest. I am fast sinking, Claude. I have borne as much as my physical frame can endure. Can you give me shelter for a few hours without drawing suspicion on yourself? In the mean time, if we have faith, we shall be enlightened as to the best course to pursue. God will never forsake his true followers in their greatest need."

Chastain saw that his words were true, and he stifled the tumult of emotion raging in his own breast to offer assistance to his old friend. His vigorous arm sustained the faltering steps of *M. Lefevre* on their way back to *Nismes*, and from his lips he learned what had occurred since they parted. With dismay he beheld his well-concerted plan of escape frustrated by this cruel blow. A few more days and the party which he intended joining would be ready to leave their desolate homes forever, while he must remain to ascertain the position of his bride and rescue her from the thralldom in which he knew she would be held.

In the mean time, what might not occur to betray his

equivocal position and hurl him to destruction? Yet he would do battle to the last: beneath his mask, so long as it could honorably be worn; openly and defiantly, if needs must be, for his spirit was not of that craven kind to shrink and cower before danger, although he had consented to use finesse to avoid it.

After a weary walk they reached Chastain's residence, and entered without observation, for the whole town seemed buried in sleep, and Claude himself would not have been aware of the destruction of the chateau but for a lover-like desire to glance toward that quarter where lay the home of his beloved before he sought repose. The lurid glare upon the sky awakened alarm, and he hurried toward the scene to verify his worst fears.

The dying lamp Chastain had left burning still flickered upon the table, and the remnants of food left by the pastor were also there. He induced his guest to take a small quantity of wine, but he could not eat. Rest, oblivion, was all M. Lefevre needed, and much as he had to oppress him, the worn-out frame would no longer be denied its rights. He had no sooner sunk upon the bed than he fell into a sleep so deep that it seemed almost like death.

With a chafed and seething spirit Chastain watched beside him. He prayed for light in the darkness that surrounded him, but none came. The blighting consciousness was forever with him that he was in the grasp of a power from which there seemed no present avenue of escape—a power as ruthless as death itself, as unscrupulous as to the means used to compass its ends as if truth and conscience are mere chimeras, of no value among men claiming to monopolize the *traffic* in the mercy of Him who said, "Love one another."

When he reflected on the position of his newly-wedded bride, the heart of the lover was torn with anguish. Like M. Lefevre, he had every reason to believe that Irene had been snatched from her father's protection to be placed under the control of her Romish relatives. The Sieur de Mon-

tour he knew to be among the most bigoted and unscrupulous of the Catholic gentry, firmly imbued with the traditions of the Church, and entertaining the most unbounded faith in her right to bring back seceders from her communion by any means. Chastain trembled to think of the measures that might be resorted to with her he loved. While M. Lefevre sleeps and Claude watches we will bring before the reader the past events which had linked the fortunes of the two families.

CHAPTER VII.

THE family of M. Lefevre had been landed proprietors for many generations. They did not rank among the wealthy nobles of the kingdom, nor did their younger sons disdain trade as a means of gaining an honorable and respectable position in society. The eldest son took possession of the paternal acres, and was contented with the fortune that had sufficed to his father, while the cadet went forth amidst the bustling, money-getting world, to win an independence by his own energy.

The sons of the family were generally men of marked character; and the name was an honored one among the archives of jurisprudence, medicine, literature, and theology—especially the last named, as one of the family had been a distinguished Reformer even before the voice of the Monk of Wittenburg was raised with such resistless power as to be hearkened to with interest and conviction throughout the religious world.

Two fortunes, accumulated by junior members of the family in the pursuits of commerce, had reverted to the head of the house, and acres were added to the paternal inheritance until, at the commencement of the persecutions against the Huguenots, M. Lefevre ranked among the most conspicuous of the dissenting proprietors in his native province for fortune as well as for distinguished personal qualities.

He was one of the first victims marked out for spoliation; and as no hope was entertained that one of his blood would prove recusant to the faith which had become a sacred inheritance, as well as a firmly-grounded conviction of right, the intention from the first was to ruin, crush, and finally destroy the representative of those who had so long defied

the authority of the dominant Church. The record in the secret drawer of D'Aguesseau ran thus:

"Lefevre. A nest of vipers, to be severely dealt with. No hope for the father; the mother's family Catholic; efforts may be made with success to restore the daughter to the faith: if intractable, let her feel the full power of the Church; son, an officer of some distinction in the king's service; means must be found to reach him also, either to proselyte or destroy."

In the days of M. Lefevre's youth the antipathies between the two sects were not so openly betrayed, nor so violent as they afterward became; and the young heir of the neighboring estate, Bertrand De Montour, found in Victor Lefevre a congenial companion, though each one had been educated in the strictest tenets of his own faith. The two young men were too ardent and full of active life to give much thought to the great polemical contest that had so long agitated the religious world like the slow upheavings of the ocean before the storm bursts which is to lash it into fury.

To conciliate was the policy of the Huguenots, and they bore many wrongs in silence, in the vain hope that their peaceful demeanor would at least entitle them to toleration. At length the spirit of proselyting seemed to receive a new impulse among the Romish priesthood, and the confessor of young De Montour required him to make strenuous efforts to bring back his friend to the true fold. It would be a signal triumph to claim one of that heretical generation as a convert to Romanism, and every inducement that could dazzle the imagination of the young man was held out to him as the reward of success.

De Montour undertook it with such a result as might have been anticipated. The strong convictions of Lefevre were never for one moment shaken, while his opponent, as is ever the case with obstinate and narrow-minded bigots, confirmed his own belief only more strongly in the dogmas that failed to convince his friend. Though often controvert-

ed by arguments that he found unanswerable, De Montour clung to them only the more tenaciously as a portion of that great power which has overshadowed every land in which it has reigned supreme as a cloud of darkness and error, which demands ignorance or blindness of heart before the reason can bow before the asserted infallibility of a system of forms, falsehood, and fanatical superstition.

Baffled himself, it occurred to De Montour that in his only sister, who had just returned to her paternal home from the convent in which she had been educated, he would find an efficient ally; and he called on her to assist him in proselyting his heretical friend. Irene De Montour believed herself as firmly grounded in her faith as her brother; and with great zeal, though with becoming diffidence, she undertook the duty assigned her.

The winning tones and graceful person of the young girl fascinated her listener, and he showed a deference for the opinions of one he admired so much, which induced her to hope for the happiest results. Lefevre, with tact which only love teaches, refrained from replying to her arguments in such a manner as to discourage her, until he felt assured that her heart had become earnestly interested in her efforts to win him over to that faith which would at once sanction their union.

When he felt, in every thrilling pulse of his heart, that this noble and true woman loved him, Lefevre spoke out the convictions of his own soul with an eloquence and power that would not be denied its meed of success, with one endowed with the sensibility to feel, and the intellect to discriminate between the true and false. He placed in the hands of Mademoiselle De Montour the history of the Popes and the Bible. He conjured her to read the lives of those men who have claimed to represent God on earth, and then compare them with the pure character of the Christian man as delineated in the sacred volume. The rest he could safely leave to her own clear mind and intuitive perception of right.

Lefevre was not disappointed in the result.

After many bitter struggles Irene De Montour abandoned the faith in which she had been reared ; with all her native candor she avowed her change of faith to her confessor, and before steps could be taken to prevent it, fled with her lover and took refuge in Marseilles, with the family of M. Chastain, a distant connection of the Lefevre family. There they were united, and remained until the anger of the bride's family had sufficiently subsided to render it improbable that any violent proceedings would be instituted against them. On their return home they were not openly molested, though petty persecutions were constantly directed against them. The family of Madame Lefevre ignored her existence as completely as if the grave had closed over her, and the two friends no longer recognized each other when they met ; but in their own home the husband and wife enjoyed a degree of happiness rarely accorded to domestic life. Their tastes and opinions were in unison, and they possessed many resources against the monotony of a country life, surrounded by a degree of surveillance that made every event in their quiet household known to the Jesuit father who had been so signally baffled, and in place of gaining a proselyte, lost one of the most promising of his own flock.

At his death he bequeathed to the abbot of the Dominicans the charge to avenge the insult offered to the Church ; and he had kept a wary eye on Lefevre, ready at the least signal of a renewal of open persecution against the Huguenots, to mark him as a victim for destruction. The coveted opportunity at length arrived. Père la Chaise, the confessor of Louis XIV., persuaded him that his own abounding sins could be atoned for by shedding the blood of his Protestant subjects, on the principle, we suppose, of the sacrifices offered among pagan idolaters in ancient times, in which the blood of the innocent was considered as an expiation for the sins of the guilty.

The dragonnades were ordered, and a party of dissolute soldiers were quartered on the family at the chateau, with

licence to insult and destroy with impunity. The only drawback to the happiness of the family had hitherto been that their children might be removed from them and placed under Romish influence. It had many times been threatened; but some signal interposition of Providence seemed to the parents to avert the impending blow just as it was ready to fall, and the son and daughter were suffered to grow to maturity beneath the paternal roof.

Gerauld betrayed such strong military preferences that he was at length permitted to follow the bent of his inclinations, and enter the army of the king, which was performing brilliant deeds of valor in Flanders. He soon distinguished himself; and, in an unusually short space of time, won the rank of colonel, through his own gallantry and noble traits of character.

An interval of nearly eight years was between his birth and that of Irene, and she grew to womanhood after Gerauld's departure from his home; but the brother and sister often met during his brief visits to the paternal mansion, and a strong attachment united their hearts.

Among the friends who clung to M. Lefevre, and often aided in protecting him from the strong arm of ecclesiastical power, was the family of M. Chastain, in whose house his marriage had taken place. Though members of the Established Church, they were not so bigoted to their creed as not to be able to appreciate virtue and integrity in those who seceded from it; and the high estimation in which they held the personal qualities of Lefevre and his wife, caused a permanent friendship to be established between them. An annual visit on each side kept alive these feelings: a portion of every winter was spent with their friends in Marseilles, and they, in their turn, enlivened the solitude of the country during the bright months of summer.

M. Chastain and his wife were advanced in life, with but one son, the child of their old age; and from boyhood Claude had shown a marked preference for the quiet little Irene, who was half afraid of him and his wild pranks, though she

loved him with all her heart. The children grew to maturity, and the parents of Chastain were gathered to their fathers just before the storm of persecution burst upon the doomed valley in which the fortunes of the Lefevre family were cast.

Claude, at the demise of his parents, found himself the heir to a small property, which he wished to increase for the sake of his young betrothed. He had been educated to fill the position of an advocate, in anticipation of falling heir to a maternal uncle engaged in that profession in Nismes. Thither he removed, and entered the office of his relative, who lived barely long enough to initiate his successor into the business he was to follow.

During the life of his parents Chastain's friends had refrained from seeking to influence his religious opinions; but after they had passed from the scene, and Claude openly asked permission to win their cherished daughter for his bride, M. Lefevre and his wife made it a condition of their consent that he should examine the points on which their faith differed; for they could never give Irene to him while so wide a gulf separated them in a matter of such vital importance. It would be better to break the ties of affection that united them, than permit a union in which the most momentous of all interests must inevitably become a source of unhappiness, if not of ultimate discord.

Fearing that his attachment to Irene unduly influenced him, Chastain for a long time resisted the convictions of his own judgment. He diligently examined every argument for or against the different sides of the question; and at length almost reluctantly confessed that truth and right were with the Huguenots. Just as this conviction came to him, it became dangerous not only to the person who renounced the Romish faith to do so openly, but those who were suspected of being instrumental in his conversion were liable to the severest penalties.

Only to his friend at the chateau did Chastain dare to avow the change in his opinions; but with his characteris-

tic energy he immediately set about preparing to seek a home in some land where freedom to worship God according to his own conscience should at least be the heritage of every man.

In the mean time, the outrages which preceded the revocation of the Edict of Nantes filled the whole land with suffering and horror. Ingenuity was tortured to invent new modes of punishment for the hapless Huguenots, and crimes were daily and hourly perpetrated in the name of Religion which humanity shudders even at this distant day to imagine. Indignity and outrage dwelt in the household of Lefevre, and the family were driven to take refuge in the tower where we first beheld them. The health of Madame Lefevre slowly failed as misfortune darkened around her oppressed husband; and finally the sorely-tried spirit was summoned to its reward.

Chastain sat through the weary hours in a fever of impatience and doubt; his excited imagination following the helpless girl who had been torn from her father, yet compelled to curb the impulse which prompted him to seek her at all hazards to himself. Then the sickening conviction came to him, that by so doing he would only deprive himself of every chance of rescuing her, and bring down the vengeance of the all-powerful ecclesiastics upon himself. Any premature movement which betrayed his exact position would cause him to be thrown into a dungeon, whence he might never again emerge to the light of day. Such things were of daily occurrence, and should his secession from the faith of his fathers become known to the priests, he was well aware that no mercy would be shown him.

Thus compelled to inaction, when every indignant pulse in his frame throbbed almost to madness at the position in which he found himself, poor Claude suffered more in those few hours of uncertainty than even amidst the subsequent dangers that encompassed him.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Mademoiselle Lefevre was borne from the tower, she was taken, in a half insensible state, to the garden of the chateau, and placed on a rustic seat beside the fountain. A few drops of water from the cool spray soon restored to her the power of vivid thought and intense apprehension; but she had been trained in a school of suffering which had taught her a wonderful power of self-control.

When Irene recovered from the faintness which had overcome her in the first moment of alarm, her faculties were collected and ready for use in the emergency in which she was placed. She unclosed her eyes and looked around. A dragoon stood in front of her in a respectful attitude, though by the dim light of the stars she could not recognize his features. She endeavored to steady her voice as she asked,

"Who are you? and what is your purpose in thus tearing me from my unhappy father?"

"Mademoiselle, I but obey orders; but you need have no fear of me. By this light you can not see my face, but the tones of my voice may perhaps be remembered, and give you an assurance of safety so long as I am your protector."

"Ah! it is M. Ammonet who speaks to me. Tell me why I am thus separated from my father, and what is the purpose of those who thus ill-treat us."

"Their purpose, mademoiselle, is avowed daily and hourly," he replied, with sarcastic emphasis; "It is to win back souls to the true faith. I am a son of holy Mother Church, but I am still a man; and to-night, when the orders came from the priest to use more stringent measures with your father, when I found that you were to be separated from him, I volunteered to join those selected to perform the service, that I might be of some use to you. It was I who tore

you from the arms of M. Lefevre, but it was to save you from the grasp of others ready to do the same. After I left the tower this evening a message came to me from Captain Delmont, saying to me that he would be here before midnight to escort you to the protection of your uncle, the Sieur de Montour, and, if possible, he wished to obtain a private interview between you and himself before your departure. He named this spot as the place of rendezvous, and I have brought you hither to meet one who has both the will and the power to protect you."

Irene sighed heavily as she thought of the price which was expected in return for this protection, but her thoughts quickly reverted from herself to her beloved father, and she earnestly pleaded,

"Befriend my father, Ammonet. He is inflexible in his belief. They will gain no concessions from him by severity. Oh, for the sake of the God in whom we both believe, save this poor old man from the barbarities of your comrades."

"I will do all I dare to attempt, mademoiselle," he evasively replied, as he bowed and stepped backward, making a military salute as he did so to a figure that came through the garden with rapid steps.

Irene arose and stood before the new-comer with a heart trembling with fear and emotion, but with an air of outward calmness that gave dignity to the expression of her form. His first impulse was to seize her hand and press it to his lips, but a glance toward her checked the familiarity. He hastily said,

"You may retire, Ammonet. Take your station at the upper end of this walk and see that no interruption comes from that quarter."

The soldier bowed low and hastened to the spot indicated, while Irene summoned all her courage, and steadying her voice with great effort, said,

"Captain Delmont, these men who have so long dwelt in the chateau are under your command. A party of them now practice their fanatical fury upon my beloved father. You

can save him from their indignities, and restore me to his arms. I ask it of you; nay, I implore it as the greatest favor you can bestow upon me."

"Alas! Mademoiselle Irene, you greatly overrate my power. I am but a subordinate, bound to obey orders or lose caste, perhaps life itself, if my disobedience were known to favor one of M. Lefevre's faith. I am sent hither to-night to remove you to the protection of your uncle, and I have with difficulty snatched a few moments of uninterrupted conversation with you, to show you that the safety of your father as well as your own depends upon yourself."

"How?" she eagerly asked. "Any thing I *can* do—any thing, in reason—yet why do I speak thus?" she despondingly added; "the conditions will be impossible to grant, I know full well."

"I hope not, I trust not, Irene," said Delmont, drawing nearer to her and taking her cold hand in his own, which he clasped so firmly as to evade her efforts to withdraw it. "Consent to give me this precious little hand, which I have so long coveted, and all shall be well with you and yours. Go with me to mass, and you shall be restored to your father at once, while the priests shall be beguiled into the belief that you are winning him over to the Church."

He paused as if for a reply, and Irene endeavored forcibly to withdraw her hand as she said,

"Did I not say that the terms would be impossible to fulfill? Captain Delmont, I repeat again what I have before said, I can not become your wife, still less can I perform the part of a recreant to the faith in which I have been reared. It is a subject of vital interest to me, and my religious belief may not be cast aside as loosely as a worn-out garment."

"Mademoiselle, you can not be aware of the exact position in which you are placed," replied Delmont, with earnest tenderness expressed in the tones of his voice. "The resources of your father are exhausted. The little forbearance which I have been able to obtain for him is ended. His

property has passed, by purchase, into my possession, and no hope remains either to you or him except through your union with myself. Irene, I offer to restore to you all you have lost—position, home, friends. Yes, the home of your childhood shall be yours, your father shall be protected from his enemies, if you will only become my wife.”

“And what then becomes of the claims of my brother?” she asked. “His services to the state should at least protect his right to the poor remnant of his father’s property. You mistake me sadly if you suppose I would supplant him in his just rights, even if it were possible for me to do so.”

“And why is it not possible, Irene? Your will alone decrees that it shall not be so. The king can find other methods of compensating your brother, and means shall be found to befriend him effectually if you will only link your fate with mine. My family have power, and I pledge myself that it shall be exerted in his behalf.”

He stopped and awaited her reply. It came in a low, decided voice, which fell coldly on his heart.

“Captain Delmont, will you never understand that our fates can not be united? It is painful to me to be so often forced to repeat this. Let me return to my poor suffering father, and by my presence protect him, if possible, from his tormentors.”

Irene would have moved forward, but he arrested her, and with his strong arms withheld her from advancing.

“Mon Dieu! would you rush on destruction, mademoiselle? No; scorn me as you will, proud girl, you shall not return to yonder tower, where brute force holds its revels. There your father suffers, yet you refuse to rescue him. His gray hairs in vain appeal to you for mercy.”

At these words the soul of Irene, which strong effort had hitherto sustained, grew sick and faint within her, and had she been free to choose, she would without hesitation have sacrificed herself to rescue from suffering the father she so loved and revered. The recollection of the tie which

bound her to Claude Chastain came to save her from the momentary weakness. She faltered,

"You can save him—your heart is not yet hardened to wretchedness. Oh! if one spark of mercy yet lingers there, I implore you to save my noble, my true-hearted father from the demons who are now probably torturing him."

"It is as much as my own safety is worth to interfere, unless I can carry to the abbot the assurance that you, as my wife, will renounce your heretical belief. Do not call me hard of heart, mademoiselle, when you see that the decision rests with yourself alone."

At this juncture the strength which had sustained Irene seemed at once to desert her; so long as any hope remained that she could influence Delmont to rescue her father she commanded her trembling nerves, and they obeyed the strong force of her will; but so soon as she felt how irrevocable was his intention to afford no assistance, except as the price of that hand which already belonged to another, she sank at once into a state of physical prostration that seemed almost like death.

Her form drooped forward, and would have fallen, had not Delmont sustained her. Touched by her suffering, in spite of the bitter feeling her rejection had stirred in his heart, he bathed her face with water from the fountain, and waited patiently until she recovered sufficiently to walk. He then said,

"We must leave this place, mademoiselle. My orders are positive to take you to the Chateau de Montour before midnight. I have already wasted too much time in endeavoring to convince you that the love of an honest heart is better than the cell of the ascetic, to which your uncle will doubtless condemn you, until your recantation is obtained. Mine, at least, would have been the easiest route to Rome."

"And must I indeed go without one word with my father? Let me see him once more, if it is only for a single brief moment. I would bid him adieu, until we meet in

that better land where 'the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' "

"It is impossible, mademoiselle; you can not return to the tower. I must use the authority delegated to me, to remove you where you will be safe. If you knew as much as I unhappily do, you would at least feel gratitude toward me for refusing your request."

Captain Delmont, without pausing for a reply, summoned Ammonet to his side by a shrill whistle; after receiving a brief order, the dragoon hurried toward the lower end of the garden, from which a gate in the wall opened on the country beyond. More slowly his commander followed him, accompanied by Mademoiselle Lefevre. Irene wrung her hands in anguish, and many times she paused and looked back on the beloved home she was leaving. She tried in imagination to pierce the tower walls, and behold what was passing within them; familiar with tales of the cruelties perpetrated upon the hapless followers of her faith, her fancy pictured horrors which far exceeded even the reality of what was enacted there. When they reached the gate, she stopped, and facing Delmont, asked,

"Is it the purpose of those wretches to torture my father to death?"

"Not quite yet. In that event the inquisitors will be disappointed of their prey. They will only give him a foretaste of what must be expected, if he proves obstinate."

"And you, who profess to love me, to respect and admire him, refuse to protect him against these outrages," she bitterly said.

"On the contrary, mademoiselle, it is you who can save him, and yet refuse to do so. Speak the word now, and I will return to rescue him, even at the risk of my own life."

"I can not—I dare not," she mournfully replied, and Delmont drew her outside of the gate and closed it.

A few paces from the wall Ammonet held two horses, one of which was caparisoned for a lady; and in the background, mingled with the darker shadows of the forest, four

mounted dragoons sat immovable on their steeds. Irene was lifted to the saddle, Delmont vaulted into his own, and seizing the bridle rein of the young lady, the cortége started at a quick pace through the woodland.

At the moment of departure Irene uttered a few words of appeal to Ammonet in behalf of her father ; but Delmont bent down toward him, and whispered,

"Beware how you interfere with them. D'Aguesseau and Father Antoine will find means to punish you for so doing."

Thus warned, Ammonet did not venture near the tower, lest his prudance might be overcome by what he should witness there. He wandered into the forest as far as possible from the scene of diablerie passing there, and lying down under a tree, was soon sleeping soundly, in spite of his sympathy for the sufferings of M. Lefevre and his daughter.

In the mean time, Delmont and his party pursued a winding road through the forest for several miles ; then they began to ascend a broken and picturesque road, hemmed in on either side by abrupt cliffs, from which swayed lichens and such clinging plants as can find sustenance in the crevices of rocks. The ascent continued for more than an hour, when suddenly they emerged from a narrow defile into a valley containing several hundred acres of fertile and cultivated land, girdled by mountain peaks, that arose in the clear air of night as an uneven wall of granite. On the eastern side there was a rift in the hills ; and a sheer precipice of many hundred feet lay beneath the walls of an old feudal residence built upon its edge. This was the Chateau de Montour, which had been the inheritance of that family since the days of the crusades.

The more antique portion of the building seemed crumbling to decay ; but, like other proprietors, the lords of Montour had added such accommodations to the original pile as each successive generation deemed needful, and such state as the times afforded was found within its ancient walls. Trees and shrubbery, trimmed after the fashion of the times,

grew around the modern portion, and from a single window gleamed a light.

The party was evidently expected; for no sooner had they reined up their horses in front of the massive entrance than the door swung noiselessly open, and a man bearing a lamp in his hand appeared. Each one seemed to understand what was to be done, for in silence the dragoons dismounted, and Delmont lifted Irene from her saddle in a state of mental and physical exhaustion which made her almost reckless of what was to follow this outrage on her liberty of action.

At a sign from the domestic Delmont carried her in his arms into the wide hall hung with trophies from the chase. Passing through that, they entered a long passage leading to an apartment situated in an angle of the chateau that overhung the precipice above which it was built.

A narrow, hard couch stood against the wall, and on this Delmont placed the half-insensible girl. The floor was bare, and the rough walls had no hangings to conceal their jagged surface. In one corner stood a *prie-dieu*, with an image of Christ above it; and on a table by the head of the bed was a pitcher of water and a few barley cakes. A low seat, without back or arms, completed the furniture.

Such was the apartment the Sieur De Montour had ordered to be prepared for his niece, that from its external appearance she might augur the rigor of the captivity into which she had fallen, and his determination to pursue no half measures in bringing her over to the Romish faith.

Delmont whispered a few lover-like phrases in her ear, but she lay white and passive, apparently unconscious of their import. The attendant offered her water, which she eagerly drank, and then motioned them to leave her alone.

The two went out, and Irene heard the grating of the key in the lock, and felt that she was a prisoner. The water revived her, and an intense feeling of restlessness awoke within her. Although her wearied frame craved repose, she could not lie upon the couch. She arose and looked

out on the calm night. The window commanded a wide panorama, to which the rift in the hills opened a view; and she knew that she looked down into the valley in which her home lay, for every nook at De Montour was familiar to her from the oft-repeated descriptions of her mother.

Irene gazed wistfully toward the point where the roof that had sheltered her youth was to be found, and her vision vainly tried to pierce the dark shadows that enveloped that beloved spot. She prayed fervently for him who lay there helpless, and at the mercy of the wretches commissioned to torture him.

Suddenly a red gleam shot upward, followed by another, and another; and the appalling conviction came to her that the Chateau Lefevre was in flames. How Irene passed the remainder of that wretched night she never knew. In the morning she was found insensible on her miserable pallet.

CHAPTER IX.

IN a small cottage in the outskirts of Nîmes dwelt two ladies who lived entirely secluded from those around them. They were mother and daughter; and their household consisted of themselves and an old female servant, who had accompanied them to their new home only a few weeks before their introduction to the reader.

The building they occupied was very humble; it contained but three small rooms, so damp that the mildewed hangings were falling from its walls; yet even to this desolate abode the influence of refinement and taste had imparted a habitable appearance. The few articles of furniture were judiciously arranged, and kept with scrupulous neatness; and on the tables and in the windows vases of common field-flowers, which were collected by the younger lady in her daily rambles, were arranged with almost artistic skill.

A few books occupied a shelf on one side, which were evidently preserved with great care. The larger apartment opened on the small yard in front of the cottage, and on the morning after the eventful night through which we have just passed, Madame Altenberg and her daughter sat in that room over their nearly untasted breakfast.

The elder lady seemed past middle age, though care, more than years, had stamped deep lines upon her face. She did not seem one to struggle with patient dignity against the misfortunes of her lot; but with irritable fretfulness rendered them more difficult to bear herself, and a source of unspeakable annoyance to those around her. She lacked that spirit of endurance which to noble natures comes as an ally when Hope itself has almost faded from the soul.

Neither tea nor coffee were found upon the humble board, for they were luxuries by no means common in those days, and far beyond the slender means of the widow and her daughter. A cup of sweetened water stood beside the plate of each; and Madame Altenberg sipped hers with an expression of disgust, while she watched her daughter partake of her own with an air of abstraction that plainly showed she was not thinking in the least of its quality.

Eugenia Altenberg did not resemble her mother; the Saxon blood of her father's race glowed beneath her pearly skin, and betrayed itself in the golden tinge of her brown tresses. From her Celtic mother she derived her dark and clearly-defined eyebrows, and her large hazel eyes, with their drooping and heavily-fringed lids; yet their expression was so different from those of Madame Altenberg, that they scarcely seemed a legacy from her. An earnest and trusting soul beamed from their clear depths; and although she might shrink, as a tender woman, from the approach of suffering, they revealed a latent strength which would be developed by the necessity for its use. Her features were far from being perfectly regular, but the freshness of early youth, and the air of innocence and candor that characterized them, rendered her face extremely attractive. Her figure was *petite* and graceful, combining lightness and ease of motion with a rounded and beautiful development of person.

The deep mourning in which she was attired harmonized charmingly with the rosy fairness of her complexion and her radiant hair. Her mother looked at her several moments in silence, and then said, in a querulous tone,

"What can you be thinking of, Eugenia? Your eye wanders through the window, and you sip that odious *eau sucrée* as if it was nectar. I'm sure I can scarcely manage to drink mine at all, the sugar is so wretched in comparison with that to which I have been accustomed."

Eugenia glanced quickly toward her mother, and she replied, in a tone of sympathy,

"I am sorry it is not pleasant to you, mother; but really I was so occupied with the thought of what may occur to-day, that I was not thinking of my breakfast in the least. M. Chastain presented our petitions to the Intendant and the abbot of the Dominicans yesterday, and this morning he expected to learn if any hope exists of making good our claim."

"If there was a shadow of justice in the land there would be no doubt about it. I am a good Catholic, and so was the cousin who bequeathed this money to your poor father. By every law of right it belongs to us; but might is right in these days in this persecuted country."

"Mother," remonstrated the young girl, "pray do not speak so imprudently; your words might be overheard and bring us into trouble. These are times in which too much caution can not be observed, and we surely have already suffered enough to learn discretion;" and her cheek grew pale as she recalled their painful experience in their country home, where the father she loved had perished beneath the slow tortures of hopeless ruin and hourly insult.

Of his valuable estate a few hundred francs had with difficulty been saved to the wife and daughter, and these were already nearly expended, miserably as they lived, since they came to Nismes to prosecute a claim which would probably be denied them.

Madame Altenberg was irritated at the words of her daughter. She peevishly said,

"Must one never speak out their thoughts then? I am sure I have kept mine down until I sometimes think they will make me quite mad if I do not speak of my wrongs. I've suffered as much as if I did not belong to the true faith. I might just as well have been a Huguenot myself, for I have had as much to bear as any of them."

"That is quite true, mother; but you bore it for the sake of him that is gone, and you will not now repine over what is irrevocably past," said Eugenia, softly.

"But it's not over, child—the worst of it is with us now;

for we once had a home and resources, even if the dragoons were quartered with us; and now when your father, who was the only one in fault, is dead and gone, his widow and child, who are good Catholics, are ignominiously turned out on the world to starve. If our petition is denied, if they refuse to legitimate you, we have no resource beyond the few francs that remain in my purse, and what is to become of us God only knows."

Eugenia arose; her face flushed, her form seemed to dilate with indignant emotion as she repeated,

"Legitimate me! me! the child of parents united by a man holy in the sight of God, whose garments half the successors of St. Peter were unworthy ever to touch. Thank Heaven! that in the opinion of all noble and true hearts I am free from that stain at least."

"Well, yes. That's true enough," was the fretful response; "but the law requires something more to enable you to claim your fortune, and that is the most important point just now. If we get this money, Eugenia, I will leave France. I will seek your father's relatives in Germany; they can give us the protection two lonely women need."

A bright flush gleamed for a moment on the cheek of the girl, and after a brief pause, she said:

"Were the choice mine, I would seek a home beyond the Atlantic, far, far away from the religious strife which has made my life miserable. I would go where those who come after us may have freedom to act as they please in this most important of all earthly considerations."

"Go among savages and wild beasts to escape religious persecution!" exclaimed her mother, contemptuously. "That would indeed be making a fine exchange! For *that* bright idea you are indebted to Gerould Lefevre, I presume. By-the-way, when did you hear from him last, Eugenia?"

"It is a long, long time," sighed the young lady. "Letters are so long coming from Flanders, and half he writes never reach their destination at all."

"So much the better in this case, for now all that must

come to an end. If your preference for Colonel Lefevre were even suspected, the legacy would never be permitted to come into your possession."

Eugenia gazed on her mother with dilating eyes; she slowly said,

"I believe you are right, mother, though you express yourself strangely. But the day may come when freedom of action will be mine; then I may, without prejudice to my interest or those of any other person, reward the faithful attachment of Gerauld."

"Then the heiress of half a million will be no match for this poor officer, for his father, like your own, is ruined by the dragonnade; besides, you are not of the same faith, and the law forbidding the union of Catholics and Protestants is more stringent than when I married your father."

Eugenia's eyes regarded her mother with an expression of serious earnestness; those of the elder lady drooped beneath the mute question they asked, and she continued in a lower tone,

"I know that you are not very tenacious in your religious belief, Eugenia, for you were not educated in the strict tenets of the Church; but if you allow that to be suspected, I could never forgive it. It would ruin our cause, and break my heart."

The young girl sighed heavily, and her head drooped slightly forward as she said,

"I would that I had been rigidly educated either in one faith or the other. My dear father suffered so much for his own belief that he feared to influence my mind entirely in its favor; while you and your confessor biased my affections toward your own Church sufficiently to leave me in that unhappy condition, a mind halting between two opinions. Gerauld Lefevre would have turned the scale in favor of the Huguenots, but I refused to be influenced by him. I am nominally a Catholic, mother, and both interest and filial affection bid me cling to that Church; but I warn you that my doubts must be satisfied; and should the right

be with the other side, I will do as my father did—avow my true belief in spite of the persecutions that may await me. On the other hand, I promise you that, if I find yours to be the true faith, I will relinquish my Protestant lover. After the unhappiness from this cause that I have witnessed in our home, I will never unite myself with one whose religious belief is different from my own. Hand in hand must I walk the shining path that leads to life everlasting with him I may choose as the partner of my life.”

“Amen! Benedicite, my daughters,” said a voice which sounded startlingly near. Looking around, the two beheld the abbot standing in the doorway with his hands clasped meekly on his breast.

Madame Altenberg arose precipitately and advanced to offer him a welcome to her abode, though she was in a tumult of fear lest the conversation which had just taken place had been overheard by him.

“Holy Father, you are welcome to our humble home; may I ask which one of the brotherhood I have the honor to receive?”

“Among those who regard me as a friend I am called Father Antoine. Those who regard the prestige of worldly honor salute me as the abbot of the Dominicans. In both characters have I sought an interview this morning with yourself and your daughter.”

As he spoke, he advanced into the apartment and took the hand of Eugenia in his own; she bent her head reverently before him, though a feeling of repulsion, which she vainly strove to conquer, caused her inwardly to recoil from him. The single glance she had cast on that cold, proud face filled her with dread; for in its stern lines she read cruelty, inflexibility, and love of power. The abbot, on his side, gazed upon the fair face that changed color beneath his glance with more human emotion than was usual with him.

Mademoiselle Altenberg seemed to him to be a strange blending of the two pictures he had invoked on the preced-

ing night ; and he marveled if the heroic soul of either Miriam or the daughter of Jephthah was to be found in the graceful form before him, which looked too fair and tender to be a fitting temple for any other than soft and feminine emotions. The thought passed through his mind,

"The mother I can wind around my finger—she is easily read ; but the daughter requires study and management."

His spoken words were,

"Has my young daughter no welcome greeting for him who is drawn hither by the hope of serving her?"

Eugenia looked up, and her eye met the insidious glance that rested on her. She became deathly pale, for she intuitively felt that from that moment a power of evil had encompassed her fate, from which she was incapable of freeing herself. She faltered,

"Pardon me, Father ; but this unexpected honor has so taken me by surprise, that I quite lack words to express myself."

"Do not then look like a frightened dove at the approach of a hawk, mademoiselle, for I assure you that I have the kindest intentions both toward you and your lady mother. She has already suffered more misfortunes than should have been permitted to befall a daughter of holy Mother Church, and I must now seek to repay her."

"Yes, indeed," chimed in Madame Altenberg, putting her handkerchief to her eyes, "my Lord Abbot may well say that ; but if he will deign to help us out of our present difficulties, I shall be repaid for them all. Eugenia, my dear, place a seat for the abbot."

Her daughter obeyed her ; and, after waving them to be seated also, the priest gravely said,

"My title is only worn on state occasions. It is my will to be known, in private visitations, only as Father Antoine ; therefore, I pray you, address me thus, that I may feel as if friendly relations are at once established between us ; for I have much to say which concerns your interests, both temporal and eternal."

"We hearken, holy Father, to the words of your wisdom and kindness. Proceed, I beg, that we may learn to appreciate them still more highly."

Thus solicited, after a few moments of reflection, the priest glanced keenly at Madame Altenberg, as he said,

"Daughter, you have not so far failed in your duty to your own faith as to permit the young soul confided to your care to become tainted with the accursed heresies that are unblushingly proclaimed in the light of day? What of the allegiance of this young pilgrim to the only Church wherein the soul may be saved, to enter into the joys of Paradise?"

"My daughter has been reared a Catholic, Father," faltered the mother. "She has regularly attended the worship of the Church, and received instruction from the confessor my husband permitted to visit our chateau for that purpose, though he himself, as you are aware, was a Huguenot."

"A wonderful stretch of liberality, truly, from one who had lost his hold on the only true anchor, and drifted about at the mercy of any wild doctrine," sneered the priest, forgetful, for a moment, of the politic manner he had intended to assume throughout the interview.

The clear, steady voice of Eugenia arose in reply.

"You are mistaken, my lord. My father died a martyr to his consistent and unwavering belief in the doctrines which had been instilled into his mind in boyhood. I, his only child, can not sit by and hear him thus lightly spoken of."

"Pardon me, mademoiselle; I honor your filial piety, and I appreciate in your father the worldly wisdom which permitted you to be reared in such a manner as to escape the anger of the ecclesiastical institution, whose power he so heavily felt upon his own fortunes. Let me hear from your own lips, mademoiselle, the confirmation of what your mother has asserted. It is necessary to the good understanding I wish to establish between us."

Eugenia seemed greatly agitated; her lips trembled, and for some moments refused to speak. At length she replied,

"I am a Catholic, Father Antoine. My mother has informed you that as such I was reared; why, then, should you doubt my orthodoxy?"

"I am not to blame, mademoiselle, if your manner inspires doubt. A true believer does not hesitate thus when proclaiming her faith. I greatly fear, daughter, that the information we have received of yourself is only too true."

She looked up in surprise, while Madame Altenberg's heart beat with many painful fears for what was to follow. She asked,

"What can you have heard, Father? My daughter is yet too young to have any decided opinions of her own, and hence her uncertain manner."

The priest dryly responded,

"Those who, in times such as these, aspire to make good their claim to a large sum of money, must expect their history and exact position to be inquired into. Yours, as connected with that of a heretic, has long been familiar to me; and now, when your daughter should be able to make good her claim without an intruding doubt as to the ultimate use of this fortune, grave objections arise in the minds of the orthodox as to whether we will not be giving the sinews of war to our enemies in permitting her to obtain possession of her inheritance."

As he proceeded the manner of the speaker became severe, and his brow frowning. Although very much alarmed, Madame Altenberg summoned courage to reply,

"My life, my Lord Abbot, has been a struggle against the circumstances that surrounded me. In early youth I married a Huguenot because I loved him, without giving a thought to the conflicting opinions that must come in play if we had children to educate. Fortunately we had but one, and my husband and I agreed to have her instructed in such a manner as to enable her at years of maturity to choose her own belief. That she now avows herself a Catholic seems to me all that should be necessary to entitle her to such favors as it may be in the power of the Church to bestow."

"Fairly argued, madame, if, in the present instance, the inducement to keep up an outward show of conformity were not so great. Both M. Altenberg and yourself knew that only as a Catholic would your daughter be permitted to heir his estate; and the power to claim the inheritance bequeathed by his kinsman can, under the existing laws, only be obtained by an act of special grace toward her as a true believer. We want no wolves in sheep's clothing in the fold; and I came hither to ascertain beyond a doubt what are the true sentiments of Mademoiselle Altenberg. I wish her to speak for herself, for something in her face tells me that she will speak only the truth."

Thus appealed to, Eugenia nerved her spirit to avow the unsettled state of her mind, let the result be what it might to herself or her fortunes. She had that in her nature which made her recoil from falsehood or cowardice. She looked the priest calmly in the face as she said,

"Father Antoine, I have as yet scarcely attained sufficient maturity of judgment to give me certainty on a subject of such importance as the eternal well-being of the soul. I am willing—nay, anxious to be instructed in so clear a manner as to enable me to come to such a decision as will satisfy my own conscience. Speak to me with such words of power as will bring conviction to my soul, and I will gladly give my entire allegiance to the august faith which for so many centuries has ruled the minds of men."

Enthusiasm kindled in her speaking features, and her slight form seemed to glow with more vivid life as she thus spoke. The listener gazed on her with concealed admiration, and with secret exultation felt that the clew to her nature was now in his master-hand; and if it tasked all the subtlety of his mind and creed, he would mould her to his purposes. He gently said,

"My daughter, doubt not that I can do this. That which has satisfied the most exacting intellects—the most analytic minds, will surely be found capable of removing the doubts of a tender lamb like yourself. But that such a result may

be attained, it seems necessary to place you among those who can daily and hourly watch your progress. An asylum, safe and free from worldly care, is always open to seekers after the truth. With the Sisters of Mercy both yourself and your mother can be received as lay boarders while your cause is pending before the ecclesiastical court. I have already secured the necessary recognition of your claim from the Intendant, and the fiat of the Church is all that is now needed to entitle you to the fortune which is justly yours."

Both mother and daughter listened in surprise. Madame Altenberg asked,

"Who has so kindly interested you in our affairs, Father? Has M. Chastain informed you of the injustice with which we have hitherto been treated?"

"It matters not. It is sufficient that I know all that is necessary, and have the power to aid you, provided you hearken implicitly to my advice. There can be no doubt as to the decision, for I have it in my own hands, and you can secure its being in your favor."

In spite of his friendly words, Eugenia still shrank from his proffers. She timidly said,

"Can we not remain in our own home, Father? I promise to follow the studies indicated by you until—"

He arose and severely said,

"It seems to me that the recipient of such favors as I propose to extend to you should not cavil at the terms on which they are offered. Arrangements have already been made with the sisterhood for your reception, and apartments await you more fitted for gentlewomen of delicate nurture than this wretched habitation. I permit no hesitation. Accept my offer at once, and you may look for a brilliant reward in the future; refuse, and you shall be considered as concealed heretics, and treated as such."

This threat frightened poor Madame Altenberg inexpressibly. She exclaimed,

"We accept, we accept, holy Father! We will remove

without delay, if such is your wish. Forgive my daughter; she is young and willful, but her mind is open to conviction, as you will soon find."

"I do not doubt it," replied the abbot, with a confident smile. "Ere long I expect to behold this trembling, doubting child a brilliant ornament to the Church. If I convince her not, the everlasting truth must fail. Arise, daughter, and make ready to enter the asylum that awaits you. The carriage I have ordered will soon be here to convey you to your destination."

Thus commanded, Eugenia left the room, and with the assistance of the old servant packed up the few articles of clothing that remained to herself and her mother, and with a heavy heart prepared to place herself in the power of the man whom every intuitive feeling of her soul commanded her to mistrust. Yet there seemed no alternative. Ruin must follow a refusal to go with him, while a hope yet remained that to her mother, at least, some ultimate benefit might be secured by obeying his wishes. In times such as those the fear of gaining the enmity of the priest outweighed every other consideration, and could only be measured by the unscrupulous power wielded by the Romish clergy.

The servant was a simple-hearted and devout Catholic, who had been in the service of Madame Altenberg from the time of her marriage, and her delight at the promise of assistance from so mighty a personage as the abbot himself, was strangely contrasted with the fears and doubts of those in whose favor it was to be exerted.

Even Madame Altenberg trembled at the thought of placing herself so completely at the mercy of the priesthood, as she must be, when once safe in the walls of a convent, beneath their absolute control. She had dwelt too long among the Reformers not to be familiar with the history of abuses existing in those so-called sacred edifices, which caused the Protestants to shudder over the profanation of houses professedly dedicated to the worship of God.

It is true that her mind had rejected these tales as slan-

ders, but they made an impression nevertheless, and her weak soul wavered painfully between the necessity of obeying the commands of the abbot and the fears that assailed her of being immured for life in the gloomy walls she was about to enter. During the absence of her daughter she asked,

"Did I understand the holy Father to say that M. Chastain has communicated with him on the subject of our petition? We have been expecting him all the morning to report our chances of success."

"I rather think that M. Chastain has his hands too full of his own affairs just now to take much interest in those of others," replied the priest, dryly. "He did send me a duplicate of your petition to the Intendant, because he was aware that the voice of the Church is necessary to sanction your daughter's claim to her fortune."

"A priest of my own faith performed the ceremony. Why then was it not valid?" asked the lady, very naturally.

The abbot frowned, and after a pause replied,

"The law and the Church have both refused to sanction such unnatural marriages. If the believing wife can convert the unbelieving husband, then are they held sanctified; but if she permits her influence in this most vital point to be set at naught, as you have done, madame, do you not think some punishment is due to her lukewarmness?"

Madame Altenberg looked alarmed and disturbed, though she made no reply; and Father Antoine added,

"Your punishment has already been borne, madame, and it was quite severe enough to be relaxed a little, hence my desire to place you where your harassed mind can once more be at peace. The sisters who will receive you are ladies of noble family and high cultivation. Seclusion from the bustling world, for the purpose of worshipping God, is not incompatible with rational and pure enjoyment, and such our father, the Pope, does not refuse to those who have renounced the pomps and vanities of life. They are permitted to have books, music, and cordial intercourse among themselves. With such companionship the mind of your

daughter will rapidly develop, and it was for her sake that I solicited the Lady Abbess to receive you."

The face of the listener brightened at the new phase of conventual life thus revealed to her, and she began to hope it might not be so tedious after all, especially to those who had been so long buffeted about at the mercy of untoward fate.

Eugenia returned, followed by Rosetta, who courtesied again and again with the most profound reverence before the priest. The young lady briefly explained who she was, and asked permission for her to remove to the convent with them. He smiled graciously on the old woman, and replied,

"Certainly. So faithful a servant of her earthly masters must be equally true to her heavenly one. Rosetta shall be received as one of the lay sisters."

The old woman was profuse in her thanks; in the midst of them the abbot went to the door and looked out with an appearance of annoyance. His features cleared as he saw a huge, lumbering vehicle approaching, drawn by four stout horses. The clumsy wheels creaked at every revolution, and after slowly threading the narrow, straggling street, drew up in front of the cottage.

A man who sat beside the driver alighted and opened the ponderous door. The priest called him into the house and confided the furniture that remained in it to his care, with directions to find some safe place in which to store it until the owners wished to reclaim it.

Eugenia approached the book-shelves, and, with the assistance of Rosetta, commenced removing their contents.

"These I daily use," she said; "they, of course, can accompany me."

The abbot drew near and looked over the small but precious collection. The Bible and the Psalms of Clement Marot lay side by side; the remainder were miscellaneous volumes from the best literature France then afforded. He smiled grimly as he read their titles, and thought what dif-

ferent intellectual food would in future be offered their fair reader. He took the Bible and Psalms in his own keeping, quietly saying,

"I will restore them to you at some future time."

Though extremely unwilling to permit these treasured possessions to pass thus into his hands, Eugenia was compelled to submit in silence; and in a few more moments they were on their way to the Convent of our Lady of Mercy.

The carriage soon left Nismes behind, and jolted on through a most picturesque and broken country for several miles. Soon after leaving the city they passed the baths built by the Romans, and still in a perfect state of preservation. These are supplied with water from a fall that pours over the abrupt face of a cliff several hundred feet in height.

At length they drew up in front of a high, dead wall that loomed blank and dreary on the public causeway. A small door, painted exactly in imitation of the brick-work around it, was scarcely distinguishable from the solid wall; the priest struck three blows upon it, and without noise it instantly swung open, as if some concealed spring had been touched; but on entering the vaulted passage that led beneath a wing of the building to a court beyond, a woman in a dress of black serge, girded to her waist by a cord, stood before them.

A black hood fell over the upper part of her face, beneath which a pair of keen, penetrating eyes seemed ever on the alert to gain such information as the external appearance of those who entered might afford her. The priest exchanged a few words with her, and then passed on with the two ladies, while Rosetta was left with the portress.

After traversing the dim passage, the three suddenly emerged on an open space of greensward, shaded by lofty trees, that looked like an enchanted forest-nook which the Dryads had made their best-beloved home. Winding paths and bosky dells were found in this miniature Eden, which was surrounded on three sides by the lofty buildings of the

convent, lying at the foot of the mountain ridge which forms the background of the valley in which Nismes is built; the fourth side afforded a view of the distant city, with its spires glittering in the morning sunlight.

The abbot led the way across the lawn by a winding path, and entered a piazza covered with a grape-vine bearing heavy clusters of purple fruit. Flowers grew close beside the windows, and the faint ripple of moving water revealed the presence of a miniature fall which poured over a rocky shelf into a marble reservoir constructed in one of the natural hollows that lay near. The margin of this was surrounded by the golden willow, the water-lily, and other aquatic plants.

Over all there breathed an air of perfect and peaceful quiet, which impressed the new-comers with the feeling that here indeed repose might be found, even on this side of the grave.

Their approach had apparently been watched, for the door swung open as they stepped on the piazza, and a woman of imposing and dignified presence stood ready to receive them. She wore the same form of dress they had seen on the portress, but the material was of the finest and softest texture, and the cord that confined it in flowing folds to her slender waist was of silk. The ungraceful hood was so arranged as to appear picturesque upon the finely-shaped head it covered, and it was not permitted to shade the fair and lineless brow of its wearer.

Her features were of the Italian type, clearly and perfectly sculptured, and a world of dreamy passion must once have beamed from those large black eyes, or found utterance through the expressive lips which, even in the decline of life, preserved all the flexible charm which had once made their persuasive eloquence irresistible.

Eugenia felt strongly attracted toward her, as she stooped forward and pressed her lips upon the fair brow of the young girl. She spoke, and her sweet, full-toned voice completed the charm of her presence.

"Madame Altenberg, you are cordially welcome to the protection our roof may afford you; and the entrance of this fair vision among us, though it may be only for a brief season, I hail with pleasure. Sweet Eugenia, your history is already known to me, and I cordially sympathize with your past trials and hopes of future compensation. In the mean time make yourself happy with us, and the end of my Lord Abbot will be gained, and my heart gratified by affording you such an asylum as you so sorely need."

Eugenia thanked her gratefully; and the priest said,

"So rare a flower needs careful training, holy Mother. Mademoiselle Altenberg wishes to receive such nurture as is fitting for those who have scarcely yet learned to walk firmly in the narrow path that leads to everlasting life. I delegate this important office to you, my sister, knowing, as I do, that no one is more capable of filling it with greater zeal toward Him whose precepts we make the guide of our lives."

The abbess inclined her head, and crossed herself at the allusion to God; she then said:

"I accept the trust, Father, and I promise to accomplish my task to your satisfaction;" and her expressive eyes were raised to his with a covert meaning which he well understood.

This was not the first young spirit given over to her guidance; and the abbot knew well that he could safely trust her to bring in play all her fascinating wiles to secure his lately entrapped prey. His policy was to bring the young heiress into his views by gentle means, if possible. If these failed, there could be brought in play all the terrible power at his command to bend her to his will.

The apartment into which they were ushered was plain and unpretending, for that was the ordinary reception-room of the sisterhood, and no outward display of the luxury in which they lived was permitted there. In a few moments the abbess summoned a nun by ringing a small silver bell that lay on a table, and under her guidance Madame Alten-

berg and her daughter sought the apartments prepared for them. These were very unlike the cells they had anticipated—the two rooms opened into each other, and were light, airy, and handsomely furnished with every appliance of comfort then known to civilization.

To their expressions of pleased surprise the nun replied by saying that such apartments were prepared for lay boarders, and such she understood their present occupants to be. Charmed and soothed by the quiet around, Eugenia was glad to throw herself on the snowy couch and reflect on the events of the morning.

Suddenly she remembered that the priest had retained her Bible, and she requested the nun to ask him to restore it to her possession. She went on the errand, and soon returned with the volume of Clement Marot. She said,

"Father Antoine wishes to look over the other book himself, mademoiselle, to see if you have the right version of the Scriptures. If he finds it correct, he will return it; if not, he will give you a better copy in its place."

The Bible had been her father's, and was almost the only possession of his she had been able to retain. She could only hope that it would be permitted to pass again into her hands, though she greatly feared that such would not be the result of the proposed examination, for she was aware that it was a copy of the most complete translation of the Sacred Book which had been made.

In the mean time the Lady Abbess and her worthy coadjutor conferred together concerning those who had just left them. He asked, "Well, madame, what do you think of the new convert that is to be?"

"I think her very lovely, and not difficult to lead, if we can only strike the right cord."

"I have already found it. She is impulsive, enthusiastic, and generous: are not such the natures that easiest become our dupes?" and there seemed a latent meaning in his words which caused her eye to flash, and her lips to quiver with repressed emotion, as she replied,

"To me you may well say that; for I behold in this young girl a mirror of my youthful soul, without the wild and ungovernable passions which cast me, a helpless victim, into your power."

"Pooh! No heroics, madame. Are you not now higher in station than you could ever have been in that world whose proprieties you once outraged? Have you not led a life of luxurious ease since I placed you here as superior, after passing through the intermediate grades as a mere form. Methinks, cousin of mine, if your wealth did increase our store, you have derived fair advantages from it yourself."

The abbess repressed the reply that arose to her lips, and abruptly said,

"Let us not quarrel, Antoine, for we can not do without each other. I wish to understand you clearly. Must this young girl absolutely take the veil?"

"She must; for in that event we gain half a million of livres, from which a bonus goes to satisfy the cupidity of the Intendant, and a pittance must be spared to the mother, when her presence here is no longer needed to reconcile her daughter to remaining. Use your best art, Cécile, to gain her over smoothly; for she interests me, and I would not have her subjected to the iron discipline of the intractable."

The large eyes were again lifted to his with an expression of surprise, and the abbess said,

"This girl must possess some wonderful charm thus to interest you, who never before seemed to care for any woman of mortal mould. Why should you wish to spare her the ordeal to which others as young and tender have been ruthlessly subjected?"

"I know not—I care not, I do not analyze my own feelings; I only know that I shall be charmed with your adroitness if you gain her consent to take the veil willingly, and the privileges you have petitioned the bishop to grant your house I promise shall be the reward of your diligence in well-doing."

She smiled, and extended her hand.

"It is a compact. Eugenia Altenberg shall, with her own consent, become a sister of my order."

"It is well. I leave her to your instructions."

He arose abruptly, passed from the room, and, with his brain already full of other schemes, returned to Nismes.

CHAPTER X.

THE pathway chosen by Laval, by which to escape from his enemies, was a narrow defile leading into the heart of the Black Mountains. Walls of rock hemmed it in on either side, and the road was encumbered with fragments which had fallen from the cliffs above, and obstructed their progress at every step. Laval well knew that they would be pursued; but he trusted for deliverance to the difficulty of mounted horsemen following the precipitous path he had preferred. He also knew many secret places in these mountain solitudes, in which a small party could conceal themselves, and elude any search that was not systematically and minutely made.

The little party toiled slowly on, many bitter thoughts passing through the mind of the unhappy father thus cast out from his peaceful occupation, and banished with his helpless family, at the commencement of the autumn, to regions which only a few months later would be covered with their cold and inhospitable mantle of snow. Laval was, by nature, a man of fierce and implacable temper, and the scenes of violence and oppression he had witnessed had by no means tended to soften it. Intense in all his feelings, his love for his family was a passionate outpouring of affection which had no bounds. For their sakes he had hitherto curbed his strong soul, had repressed the expression of indignant wrath which often shook it to its centre, and his forbearance had been thus infamously rewarded. With such natures the dividing line that forms the boundary between reason and insanity is faintly marked; and it required but little more to arouse the sleeping monster in the soul of this man, and make him rend and destroy, even as he had seen others crushed by the insatiate persecutions of the priesthood.

The child awoke and cried ; by that time they had gained an open space between the hills, at an elevation of several hundred feet above the valley they had left. The mother, unused to such precipitous climbing, complained of fatigue, and wished to sit down in that sheltered spot and attend to her wailing infant. The wild emotions seething in the soul of the forester rendered him insensible to weariness, and he listened impatiently to the proposal.

"See, Antoinette, how unreasonable is your proposal. This is the most dangerous spot we have yet passed ; three roads meet here, and at any moment the dragoons may be upon us. We must push quickly on or be lost ; and the crying of the boy must be stopped, or it will betray us."

"Poor little fellow ! he suffers, I know. What can I do with him ? My arms are so weary that I can scarcely hold him up."

Laval looked around and found a ravine in which he could place the bundle of clothing he carried. Having carefully concealed it, he said,

"That may remain there until I can return for it. Only about a mile from here is a cave so well concealed that the dragoons have not yet found its entrance. It is always occupied as a refuge for our miserable people, and thither we must go. Give me the lad ; I will carry him the rest of the way myself."

He took the child and held him in a more comfortable position ; he talked to him, and soothed him, until the little fellow nestled down on his broad breast, and again slept. Relieved of this burden, his wife went on with more courage ; and Lucille followed them more like one walking in a strange and terrible dream, than like a sane and rational being. Self-accused and humbled, she would have given much for one word of encouragement from the father whom she loved and respected in no ordinary degree, yet of whose anger she had a mortal terror.

Severe and often harsh had been the discipline to which he had subjected her from the first dawning of intelligence

in her infant mind; and she knew that her present conduct, although the effect of terror and compulsion, had lowered her in his esteem; perhaps given a fatal stab to the affection he had always, in his own way, evinced for her. A fanatic Laval was by nature, and had he been reared in the narrow views of the mercy of the All Father which distinguishes the Romish Church, he would doubtless have been as great a persecutor of the heretics as the abbot himself. But fortunately, a more merciful creed had been instilled into his mind; and although he believed that creed with all the vivid strength of his nature, he did not recognize the right of one set of men to inflict tortures on another, because they differed about the path they should take to that untried existence, the mystery of which death alone may solve.

They had nearly reached a spur in the mountain road which jutted across the pathway, when the clatter of approaching hoofs was heard. The three paused, and Laval bent his head and listened attentively; he then spoke to the tremblers beside him in a calm tone,

"It is only one horseman who approaches. He comes slowly, as if weary or uncertain of his locality. Take the boy, Lucille, and you and your mother stand behind the projection of the hill there, while I watch the approach of this person, and see if he is to be feared. He, like ourselves, may be flying from our enemies."

They obeyed him in silence, and Laval stood erect, with his muscular form against the dark background afforded by a clump of cedars which grew from the crevices in the rocky wall. The road here had widened into a gap, and the starlit sky shone peacefully over it; they were above the region of night vapors, and the atmosphere was perfectly clear.

A pathway opened from the gap on the left hand, and from that side came the uneven sound of stumbling steps, evidently from a tired animal. Presently the head of a mule was seen, and soon his whole body appeared, panting with the fatigue of the ascent. A small man of very unwarlike aspect was mounted on him, and his mind was evi-

dently occupied with thoughts which had little to do with his present "whereabout." He was crooning a portion of the thirty-third psalm, and the heart of the listener leaped as he recognized the words he had himself mentally repeated that night as he looked up to the eloudless heavens and beheld the glory of the starlit sky.

"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth."

Laval stepped forward, laid his hand on the bridle of the rapt singer, and with his sonorous voice repeated another verse from the same psalm.

"'Let all the earth fear the Lord, stand in awe of him all ye that dwell in the land.' Brother, it behooveth such as you and I to stand in awe of him who sends to his people such afflictions as now encompass the godly."

Thus arrested, the rider seemed slightly startled, but he instantly resumed his composure as he looked upon the forerester.

"Laval, are you too in hiding, my good man? You do not recognize me, though it is scarcely a year since I administered the rites of baptism to your infant son, at the imminent risk of being seized and imprisoned."

"Father Lecroix! God be thanked that I met you thus, for we are both in greater danger than you are aware of. Pardon my forgetfulness, but to-night I have had much to bewilder me. What brings you here, in the very lion's mouth, in such perilous times as these?"

"My duty to my poor, suffering people. I must come at stated periods to see after their welfare, to give them such consolations as they sorely need, to keep steadfast the wavering, and show them how insignificant is all worldly suffering in comparison with the reward prepared for those who are faithful to the end."

Some strong emotion seemed to shake the soul of Laval, and he knelt upon the road, and reverently placing the thin hand of the pastor upon his own head, he said,

"Give me your blessing, Father; and ask the Holy One,

whose true evangelist you are, to give me a portion of your meek and long-suffering spirit. Oh, I need it—I need it this night above all others of my life.”

With solemn earnestness the blessing was given, and after a pause M. Lecroix inquired,

“What has happened to you, my friend? Are you alone, and if so, what has become of your family? Alas! must I hear from you another tale of woe? Can not even such as you, who led a peaceful, God-fearing life, be permitted to exercise the only blessing left the poor man—the right to choose his own method of worshiping him who on earth has decreed to him the lot of bearing many and heavy burdens.”

“Good pastor, until to-day I have been passed by without receiving any thing beyond insult and contumely; but the spoiler at last found me, and attacked me in the most tender point. I am fleeing from the wrath of the abbot of the Dominicans, and if he could get me in his power he would cause me to be imprisoned, perhaps for life, for defying his authority, and tearing my daughter from his very grasp, when he would have borne her away to be destroyed both soul and body in that school of falsehood and iniquity known as the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy. But let us leave this dangerous spot. I know that I shall be pursued; my wife and daughter are close at hand, and we can soon reach a cave used as a place of refuge by our persecuted brethren.”

He led forward the mule of the pastor, who greeted Madame Laval and her daughter with affectionate kindness; while he took from the latter the sleeping infant, saying it was easier to the mule to bear his additional weight than for the little girl. As they went forward Laval related the events of the night, and the pastor listened in pained silence. What was to become of the unhappy family, thus cast forth as the inclement season of the year was approaching, he could not see. He knew that the health of the mother was always delicate, and but little was needed to lay both her

and the fair boy he carried in his arms in the peaceful rest of the grave; but should such be the result of what had just occurred, he feared for the sanity of the husband, whose excited mind seemed already trembling between reason and madness.

The language of Laval, his denunciations against those who had thus driven him and his forth, probably to perish, were so fervid that it was difficult to believe him then in a perfectly sane condition; and the pastor used the mildest persuasions to soothe him into calmness.

A few hundred yards from the spot on which they had met there was a narrow ravine, the entrance to which was nearly concealed by a low undergrowth of vines and bushes. Through this Laval led the way, holding back the matted branches that the mule might pass through without trampling down this natural screen, which served to conceal it from observation. After scrambling through this, a few paces beyond the ravine terminated in an abrupt precipice. The party paused, and the forester again parted the underwood on the right side, and revealed a pathway winding around the face of the hill that overhung an apparently interminable depth, from which vapors of darkness seemed to rise. On the other hand, the towering hillside appeared ambitious of claiming companionship with the very stars themselves; for, shut in as they were, the sky seemed to bend down and clasp the mountain tops in its embrace.

With extreme care Laval guided the mule to this narrow ridge, on which a single false step might hurl its rider to destruction; but he could trust to the sure-footed animal, and he knew the pathway was quite wide enough to take him over it in safety. His wife looked on, and her courage, as well as her strength failed her.

"Bring me my child, Jean. I dare not venture on that path. My head would become dizzy, and I should fall over the precipice: my strength is completely exhausted; it is impossible for me to go farther."

"Nonsense, Antoinette," said Laval, almost harshly; "the

road winds only about a quarter of a mile around the mountain, and then we are at the entrance of the cave. You must proceed; the crying of the lad could be heard from here to the main road, and if he happened to wake just as the dragoons are on our track, it would be fatal to us all. Come, my good wife, I will help you on. The mule is sure-footed, and can be trusted to go on alone. Hark! there come the soldiers, by Heaven!"

Each one of the little party stifled their very breathing to listen to the clatter of horses' feet, as a party of mounted men swept over the road they had so lately left. They came to a sudden halt, and a loud voice said,

"Here seems a burrow in which these cursed heretics may hide. Shall we search it now, Sergeant?"

There was a brief pause before the answer came, and Laval measured the depth of the awful abyss before him, with the stern resolve to cast all he loved into its depths, and leap after them himself, sooner than permit them to become the prisoners of the dragoons. He had already laid his firm grasp on Lucille, when the reply reached his ears:

"That ends in a precipice only. I know one of their hiding-places beyond this, where they are likely to be. We will go there first."

In another instant they dashed on, and Laval drew a long breath. He said,

"There is no alternative now, Antoinette; you must go on or perish. Father Lecroix, proceed slowly, and we will follow you. Lucille, walk in your mother's steps while I sustain her."

His wife staggered up, nerved as much by the consciousness that her child must be followed at all hazards, as by a sense of the danger of remaining where she was. Her husband placed his strong arms around her, and guided her uncertain steps with a care unusual to him, glancing back every few moments to ascertain if his daughter followed his directions.

The path ascended constantly, and was, in several places,

rendered more dangerous by winding abruptly around an angle of the mountain side, leaving barely space enough to pass in safety. At these points Laval held the slight form of his wife clasped firmly to his breast, while the mule, guided by his instinct, placed his feet on the narrow ledge with unerring precision, and carried his burden lightly and easily over the dizzy mountain path.

It was well that the uncertain light prevented Madame Laval from seeing all the danger they braved. By the clear light of the stars the pathway looked like a dim, white line, in its widest part scarcely sufficient for two persons to walk abreast, and offering, occasionally, a few tendrils of hardy plants, growing between the strata of rock, to which to cling for a moment's breathing space in the dangerous ascent.

Laval was familiar with every portion of it, and his firm, free step trod over the narrow ledge as fearlessly as he would have strode over a level plain.

Lucille, with a courage and firmness worthy of her father, followed him closely, bravely repressing the tremulous pulsations of her heart, and keeping her eyes steadily fixed upon the guiding form in whose steps she walked.

Suddenly they seemed inclosed between walls of granite; the chasm narrowed abruptly to a width of twenty feet, and a jagged mountain peak arose on the opposite side. From the dark void that intervened was heard the rushing sound of falling waters, of which a faint glimpse was occasionally obtained as they caught a reflection from the stars, and sent it back in gleams of broken light.

M. Lecroix also knew the spot well, but his mind became so deeply absorbed with the sublimity of this dimly seen night panorama, that he forgot the danger to which each step of his faithful animal exposed him. With rapt enthusiasm, he raised his eyes to the deep blue concave above, and offered the silent adoration of a sincere spirit to that beneficent One who has clothed the earth and sky with such wonderful beauty. The child slept peacefully, and the mule

seemed to step with perfect knowledge of the dangerous ground over which he was traveling.

The pathway ended as it began, in a gorge between the hills, which, after a few yards, seemed to inclose them on all sides. The party halted, and Laval lifted a matted screen of wild vines that hung over the face of the cliff. It revealed an opening large enough to permit the mule without his rider to pass through. The pastor dismounted, and transferred the child to his mother.

"We shall find friends and shelter here," said Laval. "I will go before, and prepare those within for the appearance among them of others as unfortunate as themselves."

He bent his tall form, and was soon lost in the darkness beyond. In a few moments a glimmer of lurid light flashed through the opening, and the voice of the forester bade them enter. The pastor made the mother and daughter precede him, and followed, leading his mule.

The avenue was about twenty feet in length, and gradually widened as it opened toward the interior. A lofty and dreary cavern, lighted only by the torch carried by Laval, was passed through; a second one, exhibiting faint traces of stalactite on its walls, was also traversed, and then a door, ingeniously contrived, was opened, and they entered the home of the refugees.

The scene which there met their view was wild and fantastic beyond description. A lofty palace of weird and most grotesque architecture seemed to rise before their vision, lighted from various points by torches made of resinous woods, and placed in such a position as was most convenient for their owners.

Many groups were scattered over the large area whose appearance seemed to realize the story of the gnomes, though why they were permitted to intrude into this lighted hall, over which the spirit of beauty had thrown its most attractive spell, seemed a mystery. Haggard, hopeless-looking men, half starved women and children, with their clothing often in tatters, started forward to welcome the new-comers,

in the hope that they brought assistance to them, for hitherto the presence of Laval in their midst had been for the purpose of bringing to them such scanty supplies of food as he could obtain without suspicion.

Collected there were thirty wretched refugees who had been beggared, driven from their homes, and threatened with imprisonment and the galleys if they did not renounce their religious belief. While living in the mountain fastnesses, with no shelter save the canopy of heaven, one of the persecuted sect had accidentally discovered the entrance to the cave, and there the hapless Huguenots found safety from their enemies amidst scenes of grandeur and loveliness that rivaled the proudest palace made by the skill of man.

The area of the hall measured several hundred feet, and the vaulted arch above, by the dim light, seemed to rise to infinity. Lofty pillars, cornices wreathed with snowy flowers, and walls covered with fantastic arabesques, looking as if formed of floating mist suddenly frozen into shapes of unimaginable beauty, bewildered the eye, and appealed to the imagination.

A wide arched portal, supported on either hand by colossal figures, led into an interior apartment, from which gleamed a faint light, revealing outlines of spectral images resembling a hall of statuary.

The pastor paused and looked upon the scene to which he had been so suddenly introduced. As the gaunt forms of its hapless occupants came crowding toward him, with words of welcome and recognition, he clasped his hands, and dropping on his knees, exclaimed,

"O Lord, wonderful are thy works, and great is thy mercy for providing such an asylum for these thy stricken and suffering followers. My children, let us return thanks for that which no tyrant can take away—the hope of everlasting glory with him who died that we might live."

All prostrated themselves, and then the simple and fervid eloquence of the old man, addressed to the Omnipotent in

behalf of these outlaws for conscience' sake, revealed the secret of his influence over all classes with whom he was brought in contact. An intuitive perception of their wants and their emotions moved him to say precisely that which seemed to come home to the hearts of the wretched assembly, and tears and sighs followed his affecting appeal.

When they arose the men silently wrung his hands, with hearts too full for speech; many of them had been members of the church over which he held the office of minister before it had been destroyed and himself forbidden to exercise his priestly vocation.

The women gathered around Madame Laval and her daughter, and caressed the child, who stared about in wondering surprise at the strange scene before him. A miserable, emaciated-looking being, whose skin seemed clinging to her bones, and whose wild eyes glared with a frightened expression, as if some awful scene had stamped itself with such living reality upon her brain as never to be absent from it a single moment, drew near them and took the fat, rosy hand of the infant in her own.

She caressed it fondly, and then snatching the hand of a wasted, wan-looking child who stood near her, she placed them side by side, and said, in a strangely hollow and broken voice,

"See what this poor babe must come to. No bread for the crying children; no light for the little ones. The great Master said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me,' but the Pope says, starve, imprison, and destroy them. Mine are all gone, all—all;" and the last word was prolonged into a wailing cry that was inexpressibly affecting.

The pastor drew near her with pitying eyes, and asked, "Who is this poor creature? I do not remember her."

"No wonder, Father Lecroix, that you have forgotten Fifine, whom but ten years ago you married to Meudon the carpenter, in the pretty church you once had. She is so changed her own mother would not know her."

The pastor instantly recalled the bright-eyed, happy bride

of eighteen whom he had united to an industrious and good man; and he could scarcely realize the fact that the wreck before him could be the same being. Her hair hung over her wasted features in wild elf-locks, as white as if seventy winters had blanched them. He drew near her and asked, "Fifine, do you remember me?"

She gazed vacantly upon him several moments, and gradually the light of recollection seemed to dawn in her eyes. She slowly said,

"So many scenes of horror rise between me and the days when you pointed out to us the way to heaven, that I scarcely dare recall them. We obeyed your teachings; we sought the light of truth, and behold the result. God has forsaken his people, and left them to die of want, anguish, and terror."

"Poor Fifine! do not, amidst all other afflictions, lose your faith in the promises of him who has said, 'I am always with you.' We suffer here from the cruelty of man, but he for whose sake we bear this will reward us in proportion to our faith. We must only be patient to the end."

"The end!" she vacantly repeated; "it has come to all I loved, but it will not come to me."

She sank down and cowered upon the ground, moaning piteously, while one of the by-standers, in a low tone, related the history of the unhappy being. Her husband had lost his life in defending her from the soldiers quartered in their cottage. She had been tied up by the hair of her head, and a fire kindled near enough to scorch, without destroying her; while her two children were inhumanly tortured in her sight, until both died from the effects of the cruelties inflicted on them. Such was the tale of horror related by one who had finally been able to rescue her from her persecutors, and bring her to the asylum in which she now lingered out a miserable and distraught existence.

But Fifine's was not the only tragic story there. Every heart had its burden, every lip its tale of woe to tell; and now all that remained to them was the wretched life to

which they clung with a tenacity which belongs to the instinct of self-preservation. They heard with dismay that Laval had come to hide among the hills, for he had been their most efficient agent in supplying them with food; and when they saw four more claimants on the scanty stores in their possession, they grew sadder than before.

Laval spoke cheeringly to them, and informed them that he had many friends in the valley who would still furnish him with supplies for their most pressing necessities; and his knowledge of every path among the mountains would enable him successfully to evade the pursuit of their enemies. He reminded them that the pastor had only a few hours before him to obtain the rest he so much needed before starting on his journey again, and preparations were immediately made to furnish him with a place of repose.

The faithful mule was stabled in the outer cavern, and from beneath his saddle a blanket was drawn, which was spread over a couch of grass in one of the numerous niches formed in the irregular walls by the falling waves of stalactite. In front of the primitive couch a gigantic hand grasped a floating veil of drapery, from which fell pendent leaves and flowers. There, with his saddle-bags for a pillow, the wearied pastor soon fell into the sound sleep he so greatly needed.

No sooner had Laval seen his family safely bestowed for the night than he left the cave, and with one of the men watched without at the head of the ravine for the return of their pursuers.

They were quite sufficient to defend the pass, should the dragoons discover the pathway, and be hardy enough to attempt to pass over it. After an hour of watching and intense listening, the echo of shouts, and the distant trampling of horses, were heard. Their pursuers evidently entered the lower gorge, but finding only the precipice in front of them, wisely retreated.

The noise died away, and the sentinel re-entered the cavern and fitted into the opening a door so ingeniously con-

structed as to baffle any but one familiar with the entrance. It was a frame of wood, made like a shallow box, and filled with wet earth which, in drying, had hardened into a good resemblance of the hillside itself. This was securely fastened within, and the watchers sought repose for their tired frames.

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CHAPTER XI.

WHEN the dragoons returned to Nismes and reported the escape of both the pastor and Laval, the anger of the abbot was terrible. He immediately summoned Ferron, the treacherous clerk of Chastain, to his presence, and reproached him with such violence, that the miserable recreant was glad to purchase his own forgiveness by giving up his master to the wrath of the priest.

He denounced Chastain as in league with the heretics, and gave the information that M. Lefevre, one of the most intractable among their number, was then sheltered beneath his roof. At this revelation a grim smile flitted over the face of his listener, and he said,

"So the old fox did not perish in the brave funeral pyre he gave his dead wife last night. I suspected as much, and I am glad of it; I would not have had him escape me so easily. For this news, Ferron, I pardon you the fruitless result of the pursuit last night. Had you impressed those men with the importance of the capture they were sent to make, they would not have dared to return without those they sought; therefore I blame you chiefly for their failure. The atonement must be made, and on you must its burden fall."

"What shall it be, holy Father?" asked the trembling man, for he feared that the little hoard his villainy had enabled him to accumulate would be demanded of him; for, devout Papist as he was, he knew that money could generally purchase immunity for even crime of a dark dye.

"Remember, Father, that I am poor, and dependent on my daily labor for a support; already have I paid away large sums, for such as I am, to the brotherhood for masses

for the repose of my mother's soul. I am poor, holy Father, very poor."

"Keep your trifling store," replied the abbot, contemptuously; "I seek not to lessen it. I strike at nobler game than such as thou art. I only demand good and trusty service at your hands, and it must be rendered."

The face of Ferron brightened.

"If that is all, you may surely reckon on me. Tell me what I must do, and you shall be implicitly obeyed."

"Return to M. Chastain, and by your zeal in endeavoring to get his guest in safety from the city, win their entire confidence. His first object will be to place M. Lefevre beyond my reach, and for that purpose he will seek a refuge for him among the hills, where he can remain until an opportunity for leaving the country may be found. Laval, as an energetic man and a dependent of the family, will, in all probability, be the agent selected to conduct him to one of their secret hiding-places. An intermediate agent must be employed, for I shall place such a watch on Chastain's steps that he will not dare to act himself. You must become that agent; you must go with Lefevre to the hills, and, as a pretended refugee, accompany him to the spot to which Laval will conduct him; and thus you will be enabled to betray to us the place of concealment that of late has baffled us completely. I will take care that you shall have sufficient cause to act this part, though, of course, you need have no fear of the measures apparently taken against you."

"Wisdom speaks from your lips, Father. I listen, and will obey. I owe this Laval a grudge of long standing, and I shall be glad to deliver him over to the punishment his heresy deserves."

The priest set his teeth firmly together, and after a pause, said,

"That man has defied and insulted me more openly than any other one has ever dared do, and his punishment shall be in proportion to his offense. He, together with his family, must be taken alive; before his eyes shall those he loves

perish by such ingenious torments as the dragoons are skillful to inflict. Then the man himself shall be turned over to the tender mercies of the Inquisitors, to be dealt with according to the established laws of the Church, as a contumacious heretic. Having accomplished my wishes, Ferron, your reward shall be ample, both in money and in the motherly indulgence of the Church to her true and obedient children. Depart now to the abode of your employer, and warn him that suspicion has fallen on him. Tell him that you have sure information that a domiciliary visit will be paid him this morning, and assist him to conceal M. Lefevre. I will take care that the search shall not be so thorough as to discover him. This will give Chastain confidence in you, and henceforth your path is plain."

"Your commands shall be obeyed to the letter, Father Antoine, and my zeal shall compensate for the unfortunate failure last night."

Ferron bowed low and departed; and so wedded was he to his own faith, that he really believed he was performing good service to the infinitely pure and holy One in thus betraying to tortures and death the sincere and strong souls that were capable of sacrificing every earthly good, even life itself, to purchase the right of worshiping him in freedom and truth. To Ferron it seemed a holy service into which he had entered; and he hugged to his soul the conviction that interest and religion alike commanded him to fulfill the behests of the abbot.

With skill, craft, and a deep power of dissembling, he was a most dangerous enemy to the unsuspecting ones against whom he meditated this treachery. He knew that the cautious reserve which Chastain had long maintained toward him was slowly giving way before the belief in his trustworthiness; and the fact that Claude had placed himself so completely in his power by bringing beneath his roof a refugee of Lefevre's importance, gave Ferron the assurance that at last perfect confidence was established between them.

Ferron had been summoned at dawn of day to the presence of the abbot, and the sun was rising as he re-entered Chastain's house. He immediately sought the office of his employer, who greeted him with sternness as he entered.

"How is it, Ferron, that you absented yourself this morning at so early an hour? I sought for you soon after daylight, and you were not to be found. In times such as these, and under such circumstances as mine, this ill-timed absence is suspicious in the extreme."

Ferron did not lose his presence of mind at this address: he humbly replied,

"Pardon me, monsieur; but I could not sleep, and I went out by the first gleam of daylight to ascertain something of the fate of Mademoiselle Lefevre. She has often been kind to me, and I felt as if I must find out whither she has been taken."

Ferron knew that this was the interest nearest to Chastain's heart, and with tact he touched the right cord at once.

"And did you learn any thing of her?" he eagerly asked, as he placed his hand over his heart to quell its quick and painful pulsation.

"I did, monsieur. Mademoiselle Irene is in safety. She was removed to the Chateau de Montour, under the protection of Captain Delmont. Her uncle will make her a Catholic if he can; if he fails, then her friends had better bestir themselves, for the Sieur de Montour is unscrupulous in dealing with wanderers from the Church."

"How did you learn this, Ferron?"

"From one of the dragoons from the chateau, or, rather, the place where the chateau once was. Two fires in one night! If this goes on, we poor Protestants will soon have no place to put our heads in."

"Two! What other one beside the chateau?" I have heard of no other."

"Because it was only a poor little hut occupied by the forester on the Lefevre estate, and made only a respectable

bonfire; but it was a happy home at sunset, monsieur, and poor Laval felt as keen a pang at seeing it fall as M. Le-fevre could have experienced when his own lordly pile sunk in ruins."

The tones of his voice expressed sympathy, and Chastain regarded him attentively as if seeking to read the true character of the man. Ferron read what was passing in his mind, and he bore the scrutiny with unmoved features.

"And what has become of Laval and his family?" asked Claude.

"He fled with them to the hills, and a party of dragoons were sent in pursuit of them; but, thank Heaven! they escaped, for the party came back furious at being baffled."

"And the pastor?" asked Chastain, anxiously. "What of him? In their foray through the hills the soldiers may have made him a prisoner."

"No, monsieur; I ascertained that the men returned without making a capture. I made such inquiries as satisfied me that M. Lecroix has escaped."

"Thank Heaven for that! A load is lifted from my heart; once away from this perilous neighborhood and he will find friends to aid him on his way, and he can probably reach his destination in safety."

There was silence some moments, in which Chastain appeared deeply disturbed, and uncertain how to proceed. Ferron watched him attentively, and he mentally murmured,

"Not yet quite sure of your man, master of mine? Come, let me give the finishing stroke, and claim the confidence you seem afraid to bestow on me."

He peered anxiously around, and approaching Chastain, mysteriously whispered,

"I have a secret to impart which deeply concerns you, monsieur."

"What can you mean?" asked the young man, quickly, as he glanced uneasily toward the door leading into the next apartment.

"I am sorry to inform you," continued the dissembler, "that information against you has been laid before the priesthood, which seriously implicates your character as a good Catholic."

"What are the charges, Ferron? These are perilous times to all suspected men."

"That is true, monsieur, as no one can testify better than myself. I learned this morning from a friend who is always on the alert, that domiciliary visits will be made to-day to the houses of several persons suspected of leaning toward the Reformers, and, among others, your name was mentioned."

In spite of his self-command, Chastain changed color.

"To-day? Are you certain? At what hour?"

"No particular hour was mentioned; but the priests will be sure to come. Monsieur is afraid to trust me, but I believe I can aid him in his present strait."

"What do you mean? Why should I fear any scrutiny they may make into my private affairs?" asked Chastain, in a slightly irritated tone; for the mysterious caution of Ferron's manner seemed to imply so much that it annoyed him.

"Oh, you know best, monsieur. If there is no reason to fear this visit, I am truly rejoiced that the suspicions of the bloody-minded priesthood can be set at rest. I only know that the poor old man, M. Lefevre, has no longer a shelter for his head; and I also know that in such a strait he has no friend to appeal to but yourself. I naturally thought he must come to you; and—pray forgive me, M. Chastain, but I must tell you the whole truth—I was awake last night when you came in, and I looked out of my room to see who it was: of course I saw M. Lefevre, and I believe I can help you out of your dilemma about him."

His mobile features assumed an expression of honest candor which threw his listener off his guard. He grasped his hand and said,

"Forgive my distrust, Ferron; but in such times as the present a man can not be too cautious. I found M. Le-

fevre in the forest, watching the destruction of his home. He was the friend of my boyhood, and I could not stifle the impulse which made me bring him hither. He is in the next room, so worn out with suffering as to be unable to remove until his strength is recruited.' What is to become of him if he is discovered? The abbot is his deadly enemy, and this small house offers no means of concealment. If you can suggest something, do it at once, for I see no means of escape for him."

Ferron reflected a moment, and then said,

"These old houses are rarely built without hiding-places in them. I have heard it said that in the cellar beneath this one there is a subterranean chamber so cleverly concealed that its entrance can only be found by one acquainted with its location."

"Who told you this?" asked Chastain, in displeased surprise. "I know, by tradition, that such a chamber exists; but neither I nor my uncle ever could find its locality. How could you have learned any thing of it?"

"Be not displeased, monsieur," said Ferron humbly. "The old servant who died a few days after I took up my residence here raved of this place in his last moments; and he constantly muttered, 'Six feet to the right—sound the wall four feet from the floor—the spring is there.' I was with him at the last; and he repeated those words so often that I was forced to attend to them. I attempted to get in the cellar to verify them, but I found it fastened, and I had almost forgotten them, until it occurred to me that safety might be found there for M. Lefevre."

"It is well," briefly replied Chastain. "We will go there now. Prepare a light and await me here."

Chastain went into the next apartment to consult with M. Lefevre, whom he heard moving cautiously about. He had risen and completed his toilet, and the young man gazed with deep sympathy on his pallid features and tremulous hands. The strong man seemed utterly broken down by the anguish of the past night. His heavy leaden slum-

bers, the effect of physical exhaustion, seemed to have afforded him no refreshment, and his eyes wandered as if his mind had become bewildered in the labyrinth of wretchedness which encompassed him.

"Claude, my son, what of my daughter?" he asked. "Have you no information concerning her yet? Ah! how could I have slept while her fate is so uncertain?"

"Do not reproach yourself, dear sir, for gaining what you so greatly needed. It was a signal mercy that you did sleep; for it gave you strength to bear up against your many causes of sorrow. Irene is safe. She is, as we supposed, with her uncle. Admittance to her presence will not be refused me there, and I will see her to-day. I will find means to inform her of your safety."

"The Lord has been merciful even amidst tribulations," said M. Lefevre, devoutly. "My dear child is safe, and may yet escape the snares of her enemies. What matters it if the old and worn-out stem perishes, if the young shoot continues to flourish? I must be away from here, Claude, as soon as may be, and to you I leave the rescue and protection of my beloved Irene. She has been an affectionate daughter, and she will be to you a tender and faithful wife. I need not say to you, cherish her as the life of your life, for I know you love her above all earthly treasures."

"You are right, father," replied Claude, with emotion. "But it seems to me the part of a craven to leave my wedded bride in the power of those who are prepared to use every measure, short of actual force, to turn her from her faith, while I tamely submit to our enforced separation with the perfect certainty that she suffers anguish of mind in the prospect before her. I could denounce myself as a miserable poltroon; yet, hemmed in on all sides as I am, it is ruin to make a movement which may raise doubts as to my orthodoxy that I could only answer by the truth, for, by my faith in the necessity of our Reformation, I vow that if I am brought to bay no falsehood shall pass my lips."

"Right, right, my dear boy! But I pray you do nothing

to bring on such a crisis. Remember the sacred tie that binds you to Irene, and for her sake be cautious. In a few more weeks you may be able to make your escape from this wretched, priest-ridden country."

Chastain sighed, and after a few lover-like thoughts given to his bride, he briefly explained to M. Lefevre the necessity there was for concealment on account of the threatened visit from the priestly committee. He listened with calm resignation, and said,

"I will submit to any concealment sooner than bring evil on you, Claude. Let me go forth in disguise; I can find my way to the hills, and relieve you of my presence at once."

"Even if you were in a condition to escape that would be impossible. I am aware that a suspected house has a watch kept on it, and you would be arrested before you gained the end of the street."

"What then remains for me?" he despondingly asked, "but to be taken in the toils, and not only meet destruction myself, but become the means of bringing it on you."

"Not quite so bad as that, I hope. A hiding-place exists in the cellar of this house, and I am about to seek the entrance to it. It will be a safe retreat for you, if you can bear to spend a few hours underground."

"Any where that I can breathe, Claude, if I can save you from suspicion."

At that moment Ferron struck sharply on the door; and his voice was heard in tones of apprehension.

"Excuse me, messieurs, but no time is to be lost. I have just seen three priests enter a house a few doors hence, and they may be here at any moment."

Thus warned, Chastain arose quickly and opened the door. M. Lefevre would have accompanied them, but Chastain said,

"Remain here, dear sir, while we seek the place I spoke of. In a few moments it shall be ready for your reception. Fear no immediate interruption, for a domiciliary

visit rarely lasts less than an hour. The Dominicans love to inflict as great mental torture on their victims as possible."

M. Lefevre submitted in silence; food had been placed on the table for his use, but the sight of it was loathsome to him; he put it aside, and sinking his head between his hands, sat listening with a dull sense of pain to the various footsteps that shuffled by on the pavement without, wondering if each one, as it came, was not the messenger of evil he expected.

In the mean time Chastain descended into the vault below his apartments: for the first time for many years the ponderous door leading into it was unclosed. It revealed a square space of small dimensions, which seemed to have been used as a wine-cellar, for broken bottles and straw were scattered on the floor. Ferron carried a lamp, and he at once measured six steps to the right, and struck sharply on the wall, in a direct line, about four feet above the pavement. A loose brick fell out, and on closely examining the aperture a rusty spring was discovered. For several moments this refused to move, and the terrible fear came to Chastain that, after all, he would be unable to save his revered friend.

Another effort was made; another, and another, without success. At length it occurred to him to pour a few drops of oil from the lamp on the rusty steel; he did so, and after a few more minutes it slowly yielded beneath his pressure, and a solid section of the wall glided around as if upon a pivot. A dark opening was revealed, from which wound a flight of rough steps cut in the rocky foundation over which the mansion was built.

They cautiously descended, and stood in a circular vault about twenty feet in circumference, with small openings in the wall, evidently made for the admission of air. A table and an iron lamp, corroded by damp, gave evidence that the place had once been occupied, and again hasty preparations were made for the reception of a new tenant.

Such articles as were absolutely necessary were conveyed to the vault, and Chastain returned to the apartments above for M. Lefevre. So much time had been consumed in these preparations that they were in momentary expectation of the summons to open to those who came to search, not only into the mysteries of the house, but to sound the heart of its owner.

With some effort M. Lefevre descended into the vault, and after supplying him with a light, and the writing materials he asked for, Claude unwillingly left him, with the assurance that so soon as the house was freed from his intruding visitors he would return and release him from his subterranean confinement. It was almost with a feeling of horror that he saw the pivot turn slowly, and heard the click of the spring, as the wall closed over his old friend, and shut him in his narrow chamber.

The brick was carefully replaced, and the two actors in the scene had scarcely turned the key in the lock of the cellar, when a thundering knock resounded through the house, and a voice of authority demanded admittance in the name of the law and the Church. Chastain hurried to his usual reception room, and concealed the key in a drawer, among some loose papers, while Ferron admitted the visitors.

These were two brothers of the Dominican order, clad in long sweeping black robes, and with their cowls so closely drawn over their faces as to prevent recognition. A sign from one of them revealed the presence of the abbot, and Ferron returned it by a look of intelligence which assured him that all was right. A significant gesture toward the floor informed the priest that too critical a search must not be made in that direction, and the visitors, with noiseless steps, glided into the presence of the owner of the house.

In this brief interval Chastain had acquired perfect self-command, and he arose with dignity to receive them. As he offered them seats, he courteously said,

"Holy Fathers, to what circumstance am I indebted for the honor of this visit? I trust that I am free from the

suspensions which, of late, seem to surround even the most devout Catholics with danger."

"And not without cause, when so many of the children of the true faith suffer abominations, in the shape of heretical untruths, to unsettle their belief in that holy unity, the Church of God, one and indivisible, as it was established by his Son on earth. Claude Chastain, you are accused, first, of too great intimacy with the family of the recusant, Lefevre; and, in the second place, of having employed a clerk of that accursed and rebellious sect which takes pleasure in perverting the truths of that faith whereby the soul of man alone may live."

Chastain respectfully, but firmly replied,

"To the first charge, permit me to say that M. Lefevre has been the friend of my family from my earliest remembrance. Although differing in religious belief, my father maintained an uninterrupted intimacy with him, and it was not in him regarded as a crime. Why, then, shall the son be held answerable for the veneration and respect he cherishes for one whom he has been taught to love from boyhood? I regard M. Lefevre as a second father, and I deny the right of any tribunal to dictate to me in an affair in which my own heart is alone concerned. As to Jean Ferron, he came to me strongly recommended for ability and honesty, and as those are the first considerations in employing a person of his class, I engaged him."

There was both dignity and fearlessness in the manner of the young advocate, and the abbot more courteously replied,

"It is not our purpose either to annoy or to dictate to you, M. Chastain. We have received such information as rendered a domiciliary visit to your house necessary; but before proceeding to search your papers for such among them as we need, we wish to have a few words with this Ferron, to admonish him of his errors."

Chastain sounded a bell which summoned Ferron, and he came in with a counterfeit presentment of alarm that was inimitable. He listened to the questions and rebukes of the

priest with an air of frightened humility, and, with apparent sincerity, promised to pray for enlightenment on the subject of his religious belief. After pledging himself to visit the brethren at the cathedral daily, for instructions in the Romish doctrines, he was dismissed with a reprimand, and the abbot proceeded to accomplish what was really the object of his visit.

"M. Chastain," he said, "it is known to the Church that you are more extensively employed by the Huguenot proprietors than any other advocate in the city; why, I leave your own conscience to answer, as we have too much to do in punishing the openly rebellious to be very strict with those who still maintain outward conformity, as you do. It has become our duty to examine the contents of the boxes and drawers in this room, and remove from your custody such documents as it may seem good to us. As our authority is unquestionable, you dare not resist."

But Chastain did resist. He protested against this invasion of the rights of others in vain. The visitors proceeded as coolly in their search as if he had accorded the most gracious permission to do so. Every receptacle was opened; and deeds that had been placed with him for safe keeping by their unfortunate owners, were destroyed in his sight.

Many of the Huguenot proprietors, though ruined themselves, and forced to sell their estates for a mere tithe of their value, still desired the preservation of the title-deeds, in the fond hope that a brighter day would yet dawn upon their descendants, and in the future the lands now so ruthlessly wrested from themselves might be reclaimed by their children. But their far-seeing persecutors were resolved to frustrate this hope, and their papers were seized and destroyed wherever they could be found.

Chastain knew that he could claim no redress for this outrage; but his spirit was chafed at the necessity of submission to it. As his eyes followed the motions of those dark figures, searching jealously into every private nook, he felt a deeper loathing enter his soul toward men claiming to

have received the spirit of Christ through an unbroken succession, who thus unblushingly violated every right of their fellow-beings.

At length the abbot found what he came most especially to seek. The will of M. Lescure, the kinsman of Mademoiselle Altenberg, had been transferred to Chastain, together with family papers of importance; and these the priest took possession of. Many documents belonging to other families were destroyed, and then a cursory survey of the chambers was made. With a warning to Chastain to be more rigid in the observances of the Church, and less ready to become the agent of the Protestants in future, the two departed.

Before doing so, Chastain could not refrain from giving them the assurance that he would never again accept the charge of deeds of any kind, since the right to preserve them for their owners was denied to him. The abbot bore with this for the present; he wished to be lenient until such proofs against the young man had accumulated as must render his defection a certainty, and the necessity of making him an example to others, by the severity of his punishment, be forced on those in authority.

A renegade to his Church stirred up all the hostile rancor of the priest's nature, for it showed that an honest mind and clear intellect had fathomed the hollowness and unsoundness of that mighty ecclesiastical fabric which sought to monopolize the power of the whole earth by any means except those taught by Him whose image they cause their followers to worship, without seeking to inculcate one feeling of genuine respect for the beauty of holiness that inspired all his teachings.

And this monstrous shadow of crime, idolatry, and persecution, claims to be the only true Church! Verily, if the All Powerful can not find a purer medium through which to transfuse his grace, it were better to leave mankind to their own instincts of right, for they would be a more reliable guide.

Chastain hastened immediately to the cellar, and with

trembling hands touched the spring. It unclosed, to his great relief, for a vague apprehension had seized him that it might refuse to yield to his touch. —M. Lefevre sat absorbed in painful thought, but at the sound of Claude's voice he arose and prepared to leave the vault.

"Did you find the time long?" asked the young man.

"I do not know—I can not tell. Time lags so heavily with me now that minutes seem as hours. The joy of my life is ended, Claude; and henceforth the stern sense of duty alone must sustain me in the thorny path I am called to tread. I do not rebel—blessed be His name, who has found me worthy to suffer in his sacred cause! But what was done by the priests? I listened in vain for them in the cellar above."

"Their only object was to seize the deeds which have been confided to my care," replied Chastain, bitterly. "In the last hour they have destroyed the titles of property worth a million of livres, which has passed, by force or fraudulent purchase, into the possession of the Papists. And this, too, I must tamely bear at the command of the priesthood. I tell you, the spirit of manhood must be crushed out of me if I submit to this grinding oppression of soul and body much longer."

"Calm your indignation, Claude; its indulgence will only make you rash; and, in your present position, you must employ a portion of the guile of the serpent, as well as his wisdom, to escape the snares that encompass you."

The two returned to the upper apartment, and Chastain insisted that his old friend should lie on his couch and seek repose. M. Lefevre submitted, but the restlessness of his soul would not be quelled. He said,

"I must leave this place as soon as possible, Claude. Only in action can I find healing for the deadly mental pain that consumes me. But little time remains to me in which to perform the solemn duties I assumed last night, and I must be about my mission speedily."

Their consultation ended, as Ferron had anticipated, in

a summons to him to join it. Chastain himself suggested that his clerk should seek Laval, and, with his assistance, get M. Lefevre safe out of Nismes. It pained Claude to think of the precarious and unsettled life his old friend was about to embrace; but he trusted that a few more weeks would enable them all to escape from their present thralldom, and seek an asylum in a foreign land.

Ferron willingly agreed to perform the service required of him, and he strongly expressed his fears that his position toward the priests would render it expedient that he too should seek a refuge among the Huguenots. It was decided that, on the coming night, he should endeavor to open a communication with Laval, and inform him of the strait in which M. Lefevre was placed. This arranged, Chastain, with a beating heart, prepared to visit his imprisoned bride.

H

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Irene again unclosed her eyes and looked around with intelligence, she beheld a tall figure bending over her, clad in a half monastic dress, in whom she recognized her cousin, the young heiress of Montour. She had often seen her before, but they had been permitted to hold no intercourse with each other.

The figure of Bertha de Montour arose above the medium height of her sex, and possessed a matured dignity seldom found in a girl of twenty. Her expressive face had the same decided character stamped upon it; and critically beautiful as an artist must have found her accurately chiseled features, he would yet have been far from feeling attracted by them, for there was no soft or womanly charm in their expression. Her complexion was a clear pale olive, with a profusion of raven hair wound in picturesque folds around her head. Her eyes were large, black, and full of fiery resolution; and her mouth, that unerring index to the inner life, closed with a firmness that almost marred the beauty of the finely curved lips.

Mademoiselle de Montour wore a flowing robe of black silk, with wide loose sleeves, which displayed her rounded arms and finely formed hands. Her dress was confined at the waist by a cincture set with gems, that fastened in front with a clasp of diamonds. From this hung a rosary of emeralds, from which a heavy gold cross was suspended.

Irene gazed at her from beneath her half closed eyelids, but she found nothing to hope for—nothing to love, in that sternly beautiful face; and she turned to another person that sat upon the only seat the room contained.

This was an erect, haughty-looking man, past the me-

ridian of life, with an expression of ascetic severity that was almost repulsive. His stately form looked as unyielding as if moulded of iron, and Irene felt that it only symbolized the unbending spirit within. She grew heart-sick as she gazed on the two beings into whose power she had fallen; and again closing her eyes, a deep convulsive sigh issued from her lips.

An aromatic sponge was held to her mouth by the hand of her cousin, and a clear, measured voice said,

"She slowly recovers, father. I think she will soon be able to speak."

The Sieur de Montour arose, and, approaching the couch, looked down on the pale face of his niece. He seemed moved by some unwonted emotion as he said,

"I see before me the features of my own race, but so strangely blended with the expression of her father, that it is difficult to tell which parent my niece most resembles. I would that she had the look of neither, that the treachery practiced by both friend and sister might not be hourly recalled by her face. Yet, spite of this unhappy likeness, if I can bring her back to the right path—if I can save her soul from the torments of everlasting punishment, I will take her to my heart as my own."

"We can doubtless do that, father; for truth must prevail, and my cousin is young. She has heard but one side of the momentous question; her mind must be open to conviction. Let us first win her back to life, and then we can give to her the life of life—the true faith, through which alone the immortal soul may be saved from perdition."

Irene here unclosed her eyes, and asked for water. Bertha, with more tenderness than might have been expected of her, held a cup of wine to the lips of the exhausted girl, from which she eagerly drank. Food was then offered her, of which she, with effort, ate a few morsels. A little revived, she earnestly regarded the two beside her, and tremulously asked,

"What can you tell me of my father? Did he perish in

the flames I saw last night? Ah! that awful pang caused my insensibility."

Her uncle replied, without even a tone of sympathy vibrating in his hard voice,

"Niece, it is as well to tell you the truth at once, for you must eventually hear it, and you have none of your mother's blood in your veins if you have not courage to bear it."

"Tell me the worst; I can endure it," she faintly replied.

"Last night, while the dragoons sought sleep in their own quarters, Lefevre, moved by the spirit of contumacy that has always ruled him, must have set fire to the chateau, and probably perished in the flames, for no trace of him is to be found."

Irene clasped her hands over her face, and her frame shivered with strong emotion at this confirmation of her worst fears. Her uncle drew his seat near her, and thought this as good a time as any to speak his true sentiments.

"Doubtless 'the way of the transgressor is hard,'" he said, "and those who forsake the path pointed out by heavenly authority must expect to be dealt sternly with. Many years have been granted your father in which to return to the Church, whose arms were ever open to receive him; but he blindly turned from the light, and at length the consuming anger of a just God has fallen on him in its might. Niece, can you not in this see the hand of him who has said 'vengeance is mine?'"

Irene sat erect upon her couch and removed her hands from her expressive face; the fixed look of anguish had passed away, and in its place was an expression of indignant sorrow that almost touched the iron spirit of De Montour.

"No, monsieur, I can not—I do not. No martyr to whom saintly honors are rendered in your Church ever possessed more of the spirit of faith, humility, and Christian kindness than my beloved father. He walked uprightly

before men, and sought to do good service to his Divine Master by implicitly obeying his commands. The spirit of Christ bore witness with his spirit that he was indeed a son of God; and as such, if he perished by that terrible death, he has been received into the home of the 'just made perfect.'"

A shadow swept over the stern face of the listener, and he asked,

"Do you then utterly repudiate the requirements of the Church established by Christ himself, and venerable alike from its origin and its traditional authority? How can a true believer dare to separate himself from its communion, and set up his own individual opinion in opposition to the wisdom of ages?"

"Uncle, truth and purity are mightier than all the inventions of man, for they are of God; and he has given us a Book by which to test the pretensions of those who claim to monopolize the mercy of Heaven. 'Come unto *me* all ye that labor and are heavy laden,' says the All Father, and those of my faith obey the injunction, without seeking the intervention of a human being, often more stained with sin than the penitent himself."

"Irene," replied De Montour, sternly, "you are yet in the 'gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity,' and means must be found to convince you of your errors. I have made a sacred vow to the Virgin that your soul shall be rescued from the sin of heresy, and it must be kept. Incline your heart to the teachings of wisdom, my child, and peace and earthly honors shall crown your lot. Refuse the ministrations of grace, and my hand shall no longer be outstretched to save you from the severe penalties decreed against those who willfully close their eyes to the light, and grope in blindness of heart until they stumble on destruction both of soul and body."

Irene sank back, overcome by weakness, and she said,

"Uncle, my heart is sorrowful, and my nerves are unstrung; but the living faith taught me by both my parents,

is, in this hour, my best support. If you really regard my happiness let me keep it, for it is far more precious to me than gold or earthly honors."

"Unhappy, mistaught child!" he compassionately murmured. "How shall I bring you back to a knowledge of the truth? Your indifference to the everlasting welfare of your soul fills me with pity for your willful blindness."

Irene saw that he was really moved, and she took the hand that rested on her couch in her own, and pressing it softly, asked, with earnest emphasis,

"Uncle, is there but one avenue to the mercy of God? Shall there be permitted no diversity of opinion as to the portal by which we must enter upon that road? 'The mercy of God endureth forever;' why, then, shall man limit it to one creed, when the Creator himself has made his children to differ so widely in mind and experience?"

"God does not permit us to reason on this mysterious and difficult question. We must listen to the teachings of those authorized by divine authority to expound his will; and he who sets up his own judgment against the commands of the Church, in my opinion commits the unpardonable sin."

An expression he could not understand quivered on the pale lips of the young girl; and after a pause she asked,

"Uncle, do you remember the words of Cicero, after he was invested with the dignity of an augur?"

"I can not recall them just now: how can they apply in the present case?"

"He said that it was a matter of surprise to him how one augur could refrain from laughing in the face of another, when they knew how deceptive were the religious ceremonies they practiced with such gravity. In like manner, it seems to me the priests of the Romish Church must often smile over the results of the fanatical faith they inculcate. I have been taught to discriminate between the errors to which they cling as part of their system, and the simple worship of the Great Jehovah. To the last will I remain true, through every trial and temptation."

"We shall find means to test that," replied De Montour, dryly, as he arose with an offended air, and prepared to leave the room. "My daughter will remain with you, and she has brought with her a little book to read aloud to you. From its pages the germs of truth may be implanted so deeply in your soul as yet to bear fruit in abundance."

As the door closed on his retiring figure Bertha turned from the window, at which she had hitherto stood an attentive listener to their conversation. She drew the seat opposite to Irene, and after attentively examining her features, slowly said,

"It will be a contest of will between us, cousin; but, if I am a judge of character, I shall come off the conqueror."

"If it were only a trial of will you might do so; but it is also one of principle," was the quiet response. "My belief is not a matter of education alone, but the result of a strong internal conviction of right."

"There is but one saving faith," replied Bertha, with energy. "Therefore there should be but one Church; and to that I intend to bring you a penitent for your past disbelief in its infallibility."

"There is but one way, I admit," replied Irene, in a low, reverend tone. "'I am the way and the life,' said Christ, and I am already one of his humblest followers."

"Let us not argue," said Bertha, imperiously; "I wish to give you words of more authority than my imperfect reasoning may convey. Promise me to listen attentively to what I shall read to you, and reflect seriously upon it."

"I will do my best; but my poor head is not in the clearest state for what you require."

"No matter; with the blessing of God your heart will be touched, and, in time, your reason convinced. Irene Lefevre, until this morning we have never exchanged a word with each other, and the tie of blood which unites us I have been taught to consider as naught; yet, doubt me if you will, I declare to you that, if by so doing I could rescue you from

the delusive errors in which you have been educated, I would give my right hand to be consumed by a slow fire, I would walk barefoot to the holy shrine at Jerusalem, or perform any rigorous penance demanded by the Church I reverence as the visible presence of God on earth. All this I would not do because we are relatives, but simply to win back one deluded creature to the only way of salvation for her immortal soul."

In the excitement of speaking she arose, and her striking figure assumed a more majestic aspect; the natural paleness of her complexion deepened with emotion, and she looked like a noble statue suddenly warmed with life and passion. The fire of enthusiasm burned in her large lustrous eyes, and the stern severity of expression on those youthful features stamped her as the very incarnation of the intolerant and fanatical faith in which she had been strictly instructed. Irene felt repelled by the strange character of her beauty: she asked,

"Bertha, can you see nothing worthy the acceptance of God beyond the pale of the Romish Church?"

"Nothing!" was the emphatic response. "Its authority is divine, and they who refuse to acknowledge it are not true followers of Him who was slain that we might live. And oh, for so many slain in vain! 'Terrible, terrible thought!'"

She knelt and prayed devoutly several moments, pressing the cross at her girdle to her lips, heart, and brow; then rising, she more calmly said,

"Believing, as I do, that every soul that dies beyond the pale of holy Mother Church must perish everlastingly, it becomes my duty to endeavor by every means in my power to bring you back to the right path, or I shall be found an unfaithful servant to the beneficent Being who has given me a true perception of the right, while from so many others it has been mysteriously withheld."

Irene thought of the spirit of the Pharisee, who thanked God that he was not as other men are; but she made no reply, and Bertha drew from the pocket of her dress a vel-

vet-bound volume clasped with gold, and unclosed the gorgeously illuminated leaves. It contained the doctrines of the Romish Church, in a modified form, addressed to the more cultivated classes, and the revolting superstitions which deform a faith once pure found no place among its teachings. Had this indeed been the true manual of the Papists, the seceders could have found little to reform; but the listener was too well instructed in the abuses which a long series of ages have accumulated under the sway of an ambitious and corrupt priesthood, resolved to rule men through the most potent of all authority, the fear of eternal punishment. Through this medium *all* men are accessible, for the words of one of the great Reformers of that age are not less true than beautiful: "The belief in the existence of a God is never difficult to the good man, and in the greatest atheist that lives the heart has always something far removed from the irreligion of the intellect."

Bertha read with clear and correct emphasis, and, interested as she was in her task, her voice assumed a tone of pathos that touched the wounded heart she was so anxious to influence. Irene listened with half closed eyes, from which the tears she could no longer keep back welled slowly forth. The reader hailed them as signs of contrition, and thought in her heart that her heretic cousin would not be a very difficult conquest. Bertha forgot how much that deeply-tried girl had endured within the past twenty-four hours, or, in spite of her fanaticism, she must have felt that the inner light which sustained her was too genuine to need purification at a Romish shrine. Irene felt that to God himself she must go with the great burden of her sorrow; that, to be efficient, his mercy must come through no meaner medium to her poor lacerated heart.

Deprived, as she believed, of both her parents; her home a ruin; her lately wedded lord compelled to conceal the tie that united them until a more propitious moment arrived; her brother far away, perhaps slain in fighting the battles of that king whose commands thus laid desolate all that was

dear to him, Irene had no refuge, save in the compassion of that Being of infinite mercy who has promised to be ever near his children when they call on him.

—At length Bertha closed the book, and abruptly asked,

“Have I read to you any thing contrary to the belief you profess?”

“Nothing. The simplicity of Gospel truth I have only heard from your lips to-day. If that volume were a sincere exposition of the dogmas of your Church, it would be a model of Christian purity; but, alas! we both know that such is not the case. Let us not argue, Bertha; I am in no condition to do so. I am feeble and suffering. There is a pain in my heart, so sharp, so oppressive that I must have solitude in which to supplicate for help to bear it.”

Bertha arose and regarded her attentively.

“You suffer thus, Irene, because you are uncertain as to the fate of your deceased parents. They may be writhing in the flames of purgatory, with no one to intercede for them. Could it now avail them, I would order masses to be said for the repose of their souls; but, alas! it is too late. Take warning, I beseech you, and save your own soul before a similar fate overtakes you.”

“Is it not enough,” faltered the unhappy girl, “that I am left desolate on earth without holding up before me so terrible a picture as you have conjured up? I reject the faith that so ingeniously tortures the living, and denies to the most holy One himself the privilege of showing mercy toward those who bore the persecutions of evil men—who even perished by them sooner than deny his truth before the world. The inspired Psalmist says, ‘No man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him;’ therefore I believe not in the efficacy of such intercession. Bertha, you are hard and cruel; wedded to the fanaticism which the priests have carefully inculcated, you have learned to stifle even the instincts of humanity. Leave me to solitude; it is all I now ask of you.”

Her cousin seemed unmoved by the passionate grief expressed in the tones of her voice. She calmly said,

"Time will teach you to be more just to me, Irene. I am actuated by a spirit of duty, which, with me, is paramount to every other consideration. I can bear to be judged hardly when I feel assured that the hour must arrive in which you will thank me for my efforts in your behalf, and acknowledge that I have been your best friend. I will leave you as you desire, but I will send in my place one better able to convince you of the errors into which you have been led."

"Oh, let me rest; let me be alone," pleaded the worn-out girl. "If you would have me live, and retain my reason, give me time to think—to ask help where it is never refused."

"Now, when your heart is softened by affliction, is the time to win you over to the truth. It must not be left to harden itself in its own convictions of error. He who comes to you is a holy man of God, and therefore well fitted to give such consolations as the afflicted need."

Bertha majestically swept out of the room, and in a few moments the door again unclosed, and the father confessor of the household entered, with bowed head, and hands devoutly clasped over a vase of holy water, from which he made the sign of the cross upon the pallid brow of Irene, and then placed it on the altar, making a deep genuflection before the picture of the Virgin that hung above it.

The priest was a small, indolent-looking man, past middle age, with nothing of that stern severity of expression which characterized the *Sieur de Montour*; and it was evident that sympathy of nature was not the tie which attracted the two toward each other. He sat down beside the couch, and in a drawling tone commenced a homily that might have been addressed to a synod of Huguenot ministers, but was certainly not calculated to touch the heart, or enlighten the understanding of one unversed in the deep mysteries of theology.

At first, Irene listened wearily, scarcely making an effort to comprehend; but soon his monotonous tones produced a lulling effect, and in spite of the pain that gnawed at her heart-strings, nature asserted its sway over her tired body and mind, and she slumbered lightly, with the sound of his voice still droning in her ears.

Satisfied with his own eloquence, the chaplain went on, oblivious of the inattention of his auditor, until a rap on the door recalled him from the nethermost Tartarus into which he had hurled the souls of all heretical unbelievers. It unclosed to admit the *Sieur de Montour*, who coldly said to his niece, as she started up on his entrance,

"I trust that the efforts of the abbé to soften your heart have not been as unavailing as those of myself and my daughter. Niece, a friend of your family requests an interview with you, and as he is not one likely to encourage your wanderings from the true faith, I did not like to refuse him without first consulting you. *M. Chastain* wishes to see you."

A bright glow flashed into the colorless cheeks, and as quickly faded; tears filled her eyes as she said,

"Claude here! May I indeed see him, uncle?"

"Certainly, if it is your wish. Do you think you can walk with me to our usual sitting-room?"

She answered by rising at once, but her head grew dizzy, and with some appearance of kindness, her uncle put forth his arm and steadied her faltering steps until they entered an apartment elegantly fitted up at the other extremity of the building.

Within it sat *Bertha* and *Chastain*, endeavoring to keep up something like conversation while awaiting the appearance of Irene. The manner of the fair *chatelaine* was courteous, though haughty in the extreme; for she looked upon the young advocate as one of far inferior position to her own, and also regarded him as one who had compromised his rigid adherence to the Romish faith by the toleration he was known to cherish toward the Reformers. Had

Bertha known the true relation he sustained toward Irene she would have spurned the thought of such a misalliance, even on the part of her Huguenot cousin, with imperious scorn.

With a quickly beating heart Chastain listened to every approaching footstep, and tried to control his own feelings so far as to prevent any outward show of them before those in whose presence the meeting must take place. When Irene entered, and he saw in her changed features the evidence of the deep suffering she had lately borne, he would have given all his worldly possessions to be able to clasp her to his heart, and whisper that her father yet lived, but he felt the imperative necessity of concealing every outward expression of any deeper feeling than the interest of a friend; and only by one lightning glance of the eyes did the two, so strangely wedded, gain a glimpse into the heart of the other. Chastain bowed low over the hand he clasped with a firm, strong pressure, which told what was passing in his heart. A few commonplace sentences were uttered, and the two began to feel how unsatisfactory such an interview must be, when a servant entered and presented a note to M. de Montour. He recognized the writing of the abbot, and, with a brief excuse, unclosed it and read the following words:

"Lefevre is not dead as we supposed, but is now concealed in the house of Chastain. The latter will doubtless seek your niece to give her the information of her father's safety; and I particularly request that they may be left to believe themselves alone with each other, while a sedulous watch is kept upon them. I fear that Chastain has faltered in his faith, and for the sake of this fair face he has become an apostate. I am collecting evidence against him which hourly becomes more conclusive. If such should prove the fact, I will make him such an example as to deter others from his sacrilegious course."

The Sieur de Montour read these lines, and the suspicions to which they gave rise infused a feeling of malignant

anger toward one even supposed capable of falling away from the faith in which he had been carefully instructed. He arose, and leaving the room, summoned his daughter to accompany him.

As this was a favor altogether unexpected, both Irene and Chastain regarded it with surprise, but the young man hastened at once to avail himself of the freedom from observation he supposed himself to enjoy. He drew Irene to his heart, and the tears she could no longer repress flowed unchecked upon the breast that yearned for the power to shield her from every future sorrow.

"My life, my love, look up!" he tenderly murmured. "Your father did not perish in the flames his own hand kindled. He is with me, Irene; he shall yet escape the dangers that surround him. The God we worship will yet reunite us all in a land where the free utterance of our opinions will not be a crime."

"My dear father safe!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Claude, that knowledge of itself is happiness amidst all I have to bear! With you and my father to live for, I can be brave to endure such trials as Heaven may send until the hour of deliverance arrives."

"That hour shall surely come, my sweet Irene—my darling, precious wife. Oh, I scarcely yet dare to whisper that sacred name to myself! It seems a dream that I am really entitled to call you such."

Irene extricated herself from his embrace, and motioned him to a seat, as she whispered,

"They will leave us alone but a few more moments. Should my uncle return he would be terribly scandalized, and my position here be rendered more difficult than at present, should he suspect any interest between us deeper than that of friendship. They seem stern and hard, but I do not think they will be really unkind to me. Even if they should be, Claude, I now have a spring of hope in my heart which will enable me to sustain any amount of persecution they may inflict upon me."

Chastain sat down beside her, and made her describe the exact position of her room, and he rejoiced to find that it overlooked the precipice on which the chateau was built, as it would probably be more accessible from that point when it became necessary for her to join him in his flight. He gave her a ball of coarse thread, at the end of which was fastened a small square of stone, sufficiently heavy to steady it in its descent, and requested her nightly to let it down from her window. He hoped thus to secure communication with her, for he knew that many visits to her would not be permitted, even if they would not lead to suspicions he dared not meet.

Chastain rapidly unfolded his plans so far as they were matured; but, as yet, all was vague and uncertain before him. Irene listened with all her heart in her eyes, and Claude thought that she had never before been half so interesting, half so dearly beloved, as in that constrained morning interview.

At the end of half an hour the *Sieur de Montour* returned, completely baffled. Before he had been able to explain to his daughter the cause of their retreat from the saloon, the brief embrace of the lovers was ended, and from the guarded tone of their conversation, when he condescended to place his own august person on watch, he learned nothing satisfactory. Irene sat in such a position that he could not see her expressive face, which would inevitably have betrayed more than she cared that others should read; that of Chastain indicated care and anxiety, as well as deep interest; but these betrayed nothing more than was naturally to be expected from one in the presence of the daughter of an old friend, placed in so painful a position as that occupied by Irene Lefevre.

After a few courteous words they parted, and *M. de Montour* reconducted his niece to her prison, and locked her in, with the parting assurance that after dinner the abbé would renew his religious instructions. She received the intimation calmly, for she now believed herself armed

against all the annoyances they could bring to bear against her.

No sooner did Irene find herself alone than she examined the window through which she hoped yet to find egress from her prison. It was a narrow frame, deeply imbedded in the jagged masonry; and on trying it, she found that it opened inwardly, like a door. By standing on the seat she elevated herself sufficiently to look down the precipice which it overhung, and she shuddered as she beheld the rocky cliffs beetling over the country below, and thought of the danger of any attempt on the part of Claude to gain access to her by that medium.

There was a sheer ascent of several hundred feet, only broken by an occasional ledge jutting beyond the rough surface, but at such intervals as to offer a precarious foothold for one who might be daring enough to attempt the ascent. With a feeling of joyful gratitude she saw that by giving a vigorous impulse to the cord she could easily throw it clear of every obstruction, to the very foot of the precipice itself.

Encouraged by this discovery, Irene again closed the window and reclined on the couch until summoned to dine with the household in a lofty eating-hall, adorned with the family escutcheons and trophies from the chase. Her uncle himself conducted her to the table, and seated her, with great state, on the right hand of his daughter, while the abbé occupied the left.

It was a fast day, and a few meagre dishes only were served, of which they all sparingly partook. Bertha made no effort to converse, and from the few remarks that passed between the priest and the lord of the castle, Irene learned that more stringent orders from the court had been received, to extirpate heresy at any cost to the hapless men who refused absolute submission to the will of the monarch.

The face of Bertha lighted up with an expression of exultation, and she said, as if speaking to herself,

“Let them perish—let them perish! Better even that

than to live to inculcate rebellion against the laws of the great I Am."

Irene shuddered as she looked on her in the pride of her youth and loveliness, so unsexed by the fierce fanaticism of her soul; but her father regarded her approvingly, as he said,

"Right, my daughter. The king comprehends that it is best to strike at the root of the offense, and utterly extirpate this foul blot upon the Church. The end to be attained sanctifies the means."

Shocked and wounded that such language should be used in her presence, Irene arose, and requested permission to retire to her own apartment. Her uncle informed her that for one hour she was at liberty to walk on the terrace on which the windows of the saloon opened. At the end of that time he would reconduct her to her room himself.

Glad of the permission, Irene went forth and sat down on the stone parapet which overlooked a formal parterre shaded by a few antique oaks. There, absorbed in melancholy reflections, the time passed heavily away, until she was again summoned to her prison. There the chaplain renewed his lecture, catechised her as to her belief, and reprimanded her as one in authority. He ended by informing her that it was the fixed intention of her uncle to prosecute her, or to place her in a convent to receive the severest discipline of the order.

The young girl shuddered at this threat, but she did not waver in her trust in the power of Heaven to rescue her from this evil fate. Then she thought of her lover, and hope came to aid in sustaining her courage.

While Irene was enduring this wearisome penance, Captain Delmont was with her uncle, and could she have heard what passed between them, her apprehensions would have been more seriously aroused as to the extent of his power. The wish of Delmont to make Mademoiselle Lefevre his bride had long been known to M. de Montour; and it was a desire on his own part to complete this union which had

induced him to interfere in the fate of his niece at all. But for the love with which she had inspired a man he liked, Irene might have been given over to destruction, without one pang to him; but to win her from her faith; to give her to a Romish lord, who would restore her to the right path, would be a triumph worth gaining; and if she eventually proved irreclaimable, he could at any time surrender her to the tender mercies of conventual rule.

Before the two parted, De Montour had pledged himself to bestow the hand of his niece upon the young captain ere another month had passed away. That she would eventually bend before his iron will, he had not a doubt; he had been so long accustomed to exact implicit obedience from all around him, that it seemed impossible for a feeble and defenseless girl to brave his authority, especially when he possessed absolute power to control her destiny for good or evil. What Irene herself might think or feel was a matter of comparative indifference to him. He would act as he considered best for her temporal and eternal welfare, and she must reconcile herself to the necessity of her position as she best could.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Laval awoke from his brief slumbers, it was several moments before he could recall the events that had recently occurred; but soon they all came crowding on his mind, and he arose and proceeded to attend to the business before him. He fed the mule of the pastor, and then aroused the good man himself with the information that day was approaching, and he must be far on his journey before the sun climbed above the hills.

M. Lecroix arose from his rough couch, invigorated by the few hours of repose he had enjoyed, and while he ate a barley cake which he took from his valise, and drank a cup of cold water brought him by Laval, he scanned the wild scene the cavern presented with curious and pitiful eyes.

The dying torches gleamed fitfully over the walls, which by this weird illumination looked as if covered with shadowy visitants from some fairer land gliding down toward the wretched groups below, to offer such consolations as Heaven alone can give to hearts bleeding and lacerated as were those of the unhappy sleepers, who seemed to have fallen on any convenient spot, and sought such repose as might be obtained.

The women had found secluded nooks in which to make up their couches, but the majority of the men and the elder children slept upon the bare ground, thankful even for a safe shelter from the dews of night and the pursuit of their enemies.

The stalwart forms thus living in enforced idleness, the gaunt, strongly-marked faces, on which every variety of mental suffering was stamped, told a tale of woe that must have touched any heart claiming with them the common brotherhood of humanity. But that tie was repudiated by

their persecutors; their fanatic zeal hunted them as beasts of the forest, and considered death, even by the most terrible tortures, as too tender a doom for those who dared to exercise the privilege of thinking for themselves.

The pastor finished his frugal meal, and followed the forerester toward the entrance. He paused beside a group huddled together, and, stretching forth his hands, uttered a fervent prayer for the rescue and preservation of the hapless beings awaiting there the means of flying from their native land forever, glad to abandon every earthly possession if life and reason could be preserved.

A light form, with disheveled hair and streaming eyes, glided from the shelter of a pillar, and Lucille threw herself before him, and clasped his knees.

"Oh, good pastor!" she tremulously said, "leave us not until you have obtained forgiveness for me from my father for the cowardly act which brought all this misery upon us. My heart is broken by having incurred his displeasure as well as that of my heavenly Father."

"Poor child, what can you have done that is considered so unpardonable?" asked the pastor.

"She has denied her Lord in the hour of temptation," replied Laval, sternly. "And although she is dearer to me than my own heart's blood, I feel that, in atonement for this sin, God will require of me the same sacrifice he demanded of Abraham. The only difference will be that mine must be consummated, while the patriarch only underwent a severe trial of his faith."

"What can you mean?" asked M. Lecroix, as he gazed in surprise upon the gloomy brow and rapt expression of the forerester.

"Only that I feel myself to be one chosen to a peculiar lot, and the future rises before me a phantom of such horror as might freeze the blood in veins less fiery than mine. Within the past few hours a vision of prophecy has come upon me with a power I can not resist. I behold the long vista of woe that stretches before us ending in the dim fu-

turity in an outpouring of blood that shall appal the nations of the earth: then will the retribution have fallen, and the destruction of my people be signally avenged. But—but the victim demanded of me will be my own precious one; and, shrink as I may, this right hand must hurl her to destruction."

He stretched forth his trembling hand, and placed it on the head of the frightened girl.

"Oh, father, you have not yet forgiven me!" she murmured. "Twice last night you were on the eve of taking my life, and now you express the same intention. Dear pastor, intercede for me, that he may pardon my great fault. I am young; I fear to die."

"Child," said her father, solemnly, "you are safe from me, unless the Great God demands the sacrifice of me; then it must be rendered. If we escape the snares of our enemies, I will pardon you with all my heart, and win forgiveness for your recantation from Him whose holy cause you denied. But, should it be ordered otherwise—should the dragoons circumvent us, I warn you to make your peace with God, for I will with my own hand destroy you, sooner than suffer you to fall into the power of those who have no mercy on us. Go to your couch, Lucille, and delay not the pastor on his way; time is precious to him."

M. Lecroix placed his hands upon her bowed head, and blessed her. She then turned meekly toward her father, who seemed moved by a sudden impulse to snatch her to his heart, and he fervently said,

"Only in the last extremity will I sacrifice you, my darling; and should it come to that, your fate will only be a prelude to my own."

Comforted by this assurance of his unabated affection, Lucille returned to her recess, and Laval unclosed the door. The mule was without, awaiting his master, and a sentinel paced the narrow space in front of the entrance.

The cool gray tints of early dawn revealed all the dangers of the narrow path they must recross to gain the main

road; and even the courageous heart of the pastor thrilled with emotion as he looked down the chasm which it overhung. Though the sharp outlines of the crags were veiled by the Alpine shrubs that rose as a solid wall of verdure from its sides, enough of the dangers below was visible to cause the soul to shrink from the probability of meeting death in that terrible shape.

The mists were slowly rising from the cavernous depths, and every wreath that curled upward revealed a new phase of grandeur appalling to those perched upon the airy elevation above. Commending himself to the mercy of Heaven, M. Lecroix gave the reins to his trusty mule, and set out on the perilous descent toward the road: as they wound cautiously around the mountain path, he acknowledged that no fortress made by human hands could be more impregnable than this fortress thus isolated from the rest of the world.

Not a word was spoken by either, until they gained the ravine in which the path terminated. Then the old man uttered an ejaculation of thanks, and Laval asked,

"In what direction do you wish to be guided, Father Lecroix?"

"Four miles hence, at the Eagle Pass, a friend will meet me, who has made arrangements for my farther progress toward Geneva."

"And does the Pastor of the Desert contemplate remaining in that city of refuge?"

"By no means. My present mission is to seek our brethren in Holland on business of importance; and the route through Switzerland and Germany will be safest for me. That completed, I shall return to the field of my labors, to die at my old stand, if need be."

"That seems all that is left to any of us now," replied Laval, gloomily, as he led the way into an opening barely wide enough for the mule to pass through. "The Lord has forsaken his people, and given them over to the spoiler and persecutor. The peaceful and the seditious are alike

driven forth from their homes, while every liberty dear to the soul of man is wrested from us. Why shall we not declare war to the knife, and, like trodden worms, at least sting the heel that crushes us?"

"Because such is not the Christian spirit, Laval. The ways of God are not as our ways; and if we bear persecution for his cause, he will in time gloriously reward us."

Laval shook his head.

"It seems to me that there is a bound to endurance. In spite of the edicts against emigration our people find means to leave by thousands, and make homes in other lands. If those men would remain, would band together, and make their resistance felt, the government must be forced to respect their rights, to yield to their just demands."

The pastor seemed to reflect on his words; after a pause, he said,

"The majority of those people feel that it is not good to do battle against the Lord's anointed. God, in his own good time, will turn the heart of the king, and justice will again be meted out to his people."

"Put not your trust in princes," said Laval, bitterly. "I begin to think, pastor, that the divine pretensions of such a king as ours are as hollow as the right the grasping and vicious priesthood claim to transmit the Holy Spirit of God through laying on their sin-stained hands. Much virtue must there have been in those of the poisoner Alexander the Sixth, besides many others I could name among the popes."

"For one of your station you seem to be well read in history, Laval."

"Yes; before the worst troubles came, M. Lefevre had a school in which his people were instructed, and books were loaned them which contained such information as would be useful to them. Education, he knew, diffused the right spirit of inquiry which the priests are so anxious to stifle. I thank God for the light given to me, and I mean to make use of it. If I were permitted, I would serve Him

in quietness; but since our enemies will not suffer that, I will go forth, like Ishmael of old, but not with my hand raised against every man. I will war only on those who carry a cross at their girdle, and do deeds of blood in the name of a merciful God, while they pretend to be teachers of the doctrine of peace and good-will toward man."

"We have much to endure, but be not rash, my son. Remember the words of St. Paul; he tells us, 'that he who resists the higher powers resists God.' Civil war, even in defense of freedom of opinion, is a terrible thing; and it should be the last resource of men really claiming the true spirit of Christ."

"Our neighbors, the English, found it a good thing under old Oliver; and as long as Cromwell lived, he caused the rights of even French Protestants to be respected in some degree. It is only since his death that the king has completely trampled us in the dust."

"He was indeed a great man; but do you know that, on the restoration of Charles II., his own countrymen insulted his remains and execrated his memory? If such was the reward of a Reformer like Cromwell, what do you suppose would be that of one in your position, who should venture to defy those in authority?"

"If conquered, tortures and death," he promptly replied. "But as I have already incurred those penalties, it matters little if something more were added to the charges on which the priests would condemn me. Yesterday morning I arose at peace with all mankind, though I will not deny that I have long carried a sore heart in my bosom, on account of the cruelties practiced against my brethren. But I am only a poor peasant; I could do nothing to bridle the power of those men; and I forbore even to express my indignation, for the sake of those who are dependent upon me. Business called myself and my wife from home, and I left my daughter in charge of my cottage; she innocently sat in the twilight, and chanted a psalm when the host came by. From that simple and natural act sprang all that followed;

an act of pure devotion on the part of a young child has made me an outlaw, with all the desperate feelings that should actuate such an one. What the injustice of man may make of me in the future, God alone can tell, for there is a dark spirit seething within me that makes me fear myself."

The pastor gazed compassionately upon the working features of the speaker: it was very difficult to preach the law of submission to one who felt his wrongs so keenly; yet he saw the necessity of soothing the rebellious spirit, and, if possible, of speaking peace to the wounded heart. His words were simple and well chosen, but they evidently produced little effect upon Laval. He listened with unrelaxed brow and compressed lips, and the good man felt that he was producing a very feeble impression, if any at all, on the feelings he sought to touch.

Laval made no reply, but walked in moody silence beside him until the uneven road came to what seemed an abrupt termination. On examination, a faint trace of a pathway around a projecting cliff was found, and M. Lecroix said,

"This must be the spot on which I was to meet my guide."

He put his hand to his lips, and imitated the cry of the eagle. The echoes had scarcely died away among the hills, when it was replied to from above their heads. Presently a wild figure, clad in sheepskin, was seen bounding down the mountain side with the agility of a deer. He soon reached the spot on which the two stood, and after greeting the pastor with affectionate respect, informed him that he had been on the look-out for him since midnight. The cause of the delay was explained, and then M. Lecroix turned to bid adieu to Laval.

"Farewell!" he said, "and pray earnestly to the great Jehovah for patience to bear whatever he may see fit to send. We are but as the vapors of the morning, which the sun may exhale in an hour; but the immutable truth and wisdom of God's ways no mortal man should dare to im-

pugn. Submit to his decrees in the right spirit, my son; bearing witness in your own heart to the great truth that he who foreseeeth the end will do all things well, not only for the advancement of his true cause on earth, but for the eternal welfare of those that love him and keep his commandments."

Laval grasped his hand firmly, and reverently bowed his head; but he made no response, save a fervent "God-speed you, and preserve you to his suffering people!" and with a salute to the new guide, he turned rapidly away.

Thus far the pastor was safe on his way, and Laval be-thought himself of the necessity of seeking a friend in the vicinity of his late home, who he was certain would not refuse him such assistance as might enable him to follow the tide of emigration to Switzerland, and there find a peaceful occupation and a home for his family.

With this intent the forester turned his face toward Nismes, and by paths inaccessible to mounted men he pursued his devious way, sometimes stopping to rest, and only once to refresh himself with some coarse food he carried in his pouch, and a draught of cold water from a mountain spring, quaffed from the hollow of his hand. Several times he heard voices shouting to each other, accompanied by the loud echo of horses' hoofs; and he knew that the dragoons were at their usual work of scouring the hills to make prisoners of such unfortunate wanderers as had not found so secure a refuge as the cavern afforded.

Laval thanked Heaven sincerely for this asylum for those that were dear to him, and with a burning heart he listened to the blasphemies of the soldiers as they defiled through the hills on their errand of destruction; for tortures, death, the galleys, or imprisonment in loathsome dungeons, was the fate of all those found fleeing from the wrath of the Church.

Thus the day was gradually consumed, and toward sunset he found himself overlooking the spot on which he had encountered the pastor on the previous night. In the dis-

tance he could see the spires of Nismes glittering in the fading sunlight, and the peculiar softness which early autumn imparts to the landscape seemed a mockery to him who knew what bleeding hearts, what outraged homes were found beneath those distant roof trees. There reigned a tyranny harder to bear than that of a Caligula or a Nero, for the battle waged against it was for God and heaven, and he who failed to testify to the truths that were in his heart believed that he had set at naught the command of Christ when he said, "Bear witness of me before men."

Laval turned his eyes toward the spot on which his late home had been situated, and, after dwelling on it a few moments with melancholy interest, he looked toward the next point which was of most importance to him—the chateau of his temporal lord. It had disappeared. He rubbed his eyes as if some terrible optical illusion must have affected them, and again looked for the familiar turrets; but the space so lately occupied by the old fabric remained a blank—a spire of thin blue smoke curling upward, and settling around the scathed branches of the trees, told its own tale of destruction. The heart of Laval was instantly filled with anxiety as to the fate of its inhabitants, and for a moment he could have wept over the ruin that had overwhelmed the family at the chateau. Then a different mood came over him: he clenched his hands, and shaking them menacingly toward the towers of the Cathedral, which loomed high above the rest of the spires in the city, he uttered an anathema so fierce, so full of burning indignation, as might well have called down the vengeance of Heaven upon those who polluted the face of the land with their abuse of power.

While Laval thus stood, the rapid approach of a party of horsemen on the road below was echoed through the pass above which he was perched, and sinking behind the shelter of a neighboring clump of cedars, he peered eagerly through the branches. A party of a dozen reckless-looking dragoons came thundering down the gorge at headlong speed. Following the hindmost one was a miserable, tattered-look-

ing wretch, with his hands tied together and secured to the saddle of his captor.

A young woman, with torn dress and disheveled hair, lay in the arms of another trooper, apparently insensible; for her head hung nervelessly over his shoulder, and her pale upturned face and closed eyes were distinctly visible to the forester. These he knew to be refugees like himself, who had been overtaken in their flight; and as the party passed beneath him, Laval was tempted to hurl the loose masses of rock that lay around him upon the marauders, and thus punish them while he gave the preferable boon of death to the wretched captives.

Again Laval went upon his way; and as night darkened over the plain he ventured to descend into it, and by circuitous paths sought the dwelling of the friend whose aid he hoped to secure. He at length reached the cottage and found it dark, cold, and desolate. The open doors, broken furniture, and deserted walls told their own tale. His household had also been marked as victims to the spoilers, and whither they had gone no clew remained to tell.

Oppressed and bewildered by this new calamity, Laval wandered through the neighboring forest until a violent desire to behold the ruins of his late home seized him. He felt as if he must go at all hazards; and with reckless speed he took the nearest course to the spot. He soon gained it, and found the hedges trampled, the flowers destroyed, and of the home his own hands had built for the reception of his bride, only a heap of cold ashes remained. The voice of his long-pent feelings would be heard, and he uttered a cry that echoed through the arcades of the lonely forest as the wildest wail of human despair over the lost treasures of a human heart; the strong man threw himself upon the earth and wept like a child.

Soon he dashed the tears away in bitter scorn of his own weakness, and arose with renewed energy to face the difficulties before him. A hand was suddenly placed upon his shoulder, and turning he saw, by the uncertain light,

that a man of more slender frame than himself stood beside him. He immediately spoke in a sympathetic tone,

"Brother, you weep over the destruction of your household gods, and I could weep with you, for I, too, am under the ban of the cruel wretches who crush and destroy us in every possible manner."

Laval grasped the hand extended to him with a vehement pressure. He said,

"Misfortune then binds us together. Who are you?"

"I am one sent to seek you. Some instinct told me that you would visit this spot; and here, since nightfall, I have watched for your coming."

"That was well judged; by whom were you sent thither?"

"By one who has a right to claim good service at your hands. M. Lefevre is in hiding, and from you he requests such assistance as will enable him to escape the snares of his enemies."

"Thank Heaven he is safe, then; and Mademoiselle Irene, what of her? Is she with her father?"

"No, she is under the protection of her uncle, the Sieur de Montour, and for the present is safe. M. Lefevre is with my employer, Claude Chastain, and he wishes to gain the means of leaving Nismes as speedily as possible."

"And the chateau? how came that to be destroyed?"

"M. Lefevre set fire to it with his own hand after enduring both mental and bodily tortures which have stamped the seal of premature age upon his person. His hair, which yesterday was threaded with silver, is to-day nearly white. All that went before was as nothing compared with the anguish endured within the past twenty-four hours."

"Why do not the heavens open and the consuming wrath of an avenging God come down upon these ministers of woe?" asked the listener, despairingly. "We are destroyed utterly, and there is none to pity—none to save. My God, my God, why has thou forsaken thy children!"

A voice from heaven could alone have answered that impassioned cry for justice; and for an instant even the

ruthless heart of the betrayer was touched. He waited until Laval's emotion had subsided, and then gently said,

"Let us not waste time, for every moment is of importance to M. Lefevre. It has become known to the priests that he escaped the conflagration of the chateau, and efforts are making to trace him to his place of concealment?"

"Let us go," replied Laval, briefly. "Thank God, I can offer a secure place of refuge to M. Lefevre, where he can remain until means are found to get him safely out of the country."

Ferron made no reply, and with a gesture to Laval to follow him, he strode away in the direction of the city. The darkness of night protected them from recognition, and the two reached the house of Chastain in safety.

The interview between M. Lefevre and Laval was deeply affecting. Though holding so humble a position, the forester had always been distinguished by M. Lefevre as a man of great natural endowments and strong religious faith. He had received the rudiments of education in the humble school maintained at the expense of the lord of the chateau until Protestant schools of every class were suppressed by a royal edict, thus throwing the education of the young entirely into the hands of the Papists.

In spite of their difference in station, the strong sympathy of religious opinion often drew the two together; and many books, prohibited by law, passed from their concealment in the walls of the chateau into the hands of Laval, who devoured their contents with avidity, and always managed to return them in safety.

Deeply touched by the changed appearance of his old friend, the forester took his hands in both his own, and pressing them to his heart, said,

"The humble weed may look for nothing better than to be crushed beneath the haughty heel that ruthlessly strides over it, but little did I expect to see the brave oak also laid level with the sod. Oh! my dear master, who shall

avenge our cause when God himself seems to have forsaken us?"

M. Lefevre answered, with solemn emphasis,

"'Tarry thou the Lord's leisure; be strong, and he shall comfort thy heart, and put thou thy trust in the Lord.' If we can not do this in time of trouble, of what worth is the faith we profess? I pray for strength to be able to say, 'The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be his holy name:' and even in this dire affliction he does not hide his face from me; a power sustains me which I feel is not of earth."

The calm resignation of his features struck Laval as something wonderful—almost superhuman, and he could have bent his knee reverently before this martyr to the cause of truth, clasping to his heart the promises given to the faithful, even with ruin around him, and death in a terrific shape hovering over him.

"May God give me a portion of the heavenly serenity that sustains you," said Laval, fervently; "for I struggle on in darkness that quenches the love taught by our Master in a tide of bitter hatred toward those who so fearfully misuse their power."

"Seek to be able to use the words of the Psalmist in spirit and in truth, and comfort will come to you—'In God have I put my trust; I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.'"

"Ah! I no longer fear; it is resistance that is aroused within me. I feel as if I could with my single arm do battle with a thousand, and gladly shed the last drop of my blood in returning to those wretches, who are permitted to torment us, a fitting retribution for our wrongs."

"The hour for resistance has not yet arrived, Laval. Our people have fled before the spoilers until only a scattered and broken remnant remains; thousands have been induced through interest and fear to go over to the Papists; and we, who prefer to suffer for the truth's sake, can only oppose a passive resistance to our oppressors. Let us dwell

no longer on this subject, but tell me what assistance you can render me in getting away from this place."

Thus recalled to the purpose of their meeting, Laval proposed that M. Lefevre should at once accompany him to the hills if he felt himself strong enough to undertake the journey. Chastain was summoned to join the conference, and after some discussion it was decided that M. Lefevre should not risk spending another day in Nismes. Ferron had already made such arrangements as were necessary to enable them to leave at a moment's warning; and the clerk would also accompany them to the hills, as he had sure information that he had also fallen under the ban of the Church.

"You can vouch for his integrity?" inquired Laval, earnestly. "For I would sooner lose my life than become the means of introducing a traitor among the unhappy beings we go to join."

"I only know him as a Huguenot, and, thus far, a faithful servant to me. I know that he has fallen under the displeasure of the priests, for he was severely dealt with by them in my presence this morning," replied Chastain.

"Then let him go, in God's name; far be it from me to refuse an asylum to any persecuted Christian. I will take care that such a watch is kept on him as will baffle any attempt at treachery on his part."

It was thus settled, and soon after midnight they separately left the house, afraid to be seen together lest the circumstance of four persons being in company might cause them to be stopped and questioned. They met beyond the limits of the town on a spot agreed on, and there the painful parting between M. Lefevre and his young friend took place.

The waning moon had risen, and threw its uncertain light upon the hollow in which they stood. By its pale glimmer the two sought to take that earnest survey of each other's features which might be their last on earth. M. Lefevre said,

"I go, Claude, wherever the Lord may see fit to direct

my wandering steps; and I can only pray to him to deliver you from the evils that encompass you. Rescue my daughter from the power of her kinsman, and flee from this Sodom which is given over to the abomination and defilement of priestly rule. Lose not an hour, my son, for no man knoweth when the net they spread in secret shall close around him, and deliver him over to destruction."

"I will obey you," replied Chastain, reverently kissing his hands, and then he knelt before him for his blessing. It was given with fervent emphasis; and as he arose, the young man said,

"If possible, let me know your ultimate place of refuge; but as that may not be in your power, let us settle on the spot we will each one seek when we are so fortunate as to make good our escape from unhappy France. Gerould and myself, in anticipation of this day, long since agreed that one of the English colonies in America will be the safest asylum for us; for the people there, like ourselves, were many of them driven from their homes by religious persecution. Although of a different race, they have the same faith, which will now be a stronger bond of union than the same language and the same blood. We fixed on the colony of Virginia as more congenial in climate with our own than either of the others; and thither let us all aim to bend our steps, in the hope of eventually being reunited."

"I will remember, my son; and should Heaven permit my rescue from this desecrated land, it shall become my constant endeavor to reach that spot to join you if you are fortunate enough to escape, to prepare a home for you if I should be the first to reach the land of promise. Convey to my darling child every assurance of my continued affection; say to her all that may console her for my exile. Ah! in such a moment as this, a thousand feelings crowd for utterance, and words may not be found to express them. Adieu, and may the blessing of Him who can guide us out of all difficulties remain with you, my dear son."

They wrung each other's hands, and Lefevre turned away.

Chastain watched their receding forms as long as they were visible; and then, with a heavy and foreboding heart, retraced his steps toward the town. Late as it was, he took a pathway leading toward the plateau on which the Chateau de Montour looked down, and after an hour's walk stood beneath the frowning cliff over which the window of Irene opened.

After a careful search he found the slender cord thrown from the casement above, from which a faint light still gleamed. As the moon arose in the heavens, its beams became clearer, and seating himself upon a fragment of rock, Claude took pencil and paper from his pocket and wrote a few lines to Irene, informing her of her father's escape to the hills. This he tied to the cord, and endeavored to attract the attention of the fair prisoner.

To make sure of being aroused even from a deep sleep, Irene had fastened the other end of the thread to her wrist, and she instantly arose and looked down. Only the faint shadow of a form could be seen, but she knew it must be Chastain, and with a beating heart she began to wind up the string. Several times it caught upon projecting edges of the rock, but it was finally grasped safely in her trembling hands. A taper burned on the altar below the Virgin, and by its light she perused the few words addressed to her, but no means were left her to reply to them. She could only stand before the window and kiss her hand, and stretch forth her arms toward Chastain, who remained below watching her movements, and vainly hoping for a reply to his missive.

As the lover, with strained eyes, looked upward to the dark phantom, which he knew to be his bride, a taller form suddenly appeared beside her, tore her from the window, which was shut with violence, and in another instant the light was extinguished.

Claude paused to measure the height of the rocky wall, with the desperate intention of scaling it at all hazards, when a carbine was discharged at him from the cliff above,

and the shot passed within a few inches of his head. Voices were heard descending the pathway which led into the valley, and no resource was left to him but to retreat before he was discovered.

With an exasperated heart Chastain retraced his steps, and as day was breaking sought his sleepless pillow. Even the fatigue he had undergone could not bring repose to his excited spirit; he lay there revolving schemes for the rescue of Irene and their escape to a more tolerant land, until the broad sunlight streamed into the room, and with it came a loud summons again to open in the name of the law and the Church.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE betrayer is always a coward, and Ferron was no exception to the rule. When he saw the dangerous pathway by which the cave was approached, his soul trembled and shrank within him, and he earnestly wished that he had secured his two companions while they were in his power in the city. He had been more than once tempted to do this; but the abbot's commands had been so positive, and he seemed to attach such importance to the discovery of the retreat, which had hitherto evaded the strictest search of the dragoons, that he feared to disobey him.

When he stepped on the narrow and precipitous ledge over which he must travel, his head grew dizzy, and his soul fainted within him; for he felt certain that he should never have courage to venture over it alone, and he beheld himself entrapped in his own snare—a prisoner among those with whom he had no sympathies in common, and compelled to endure privations for which, in his case, there was no need.

When they reached the chasm, he would have shrunk back, but the eye of Laval was upon him, and he dared not arouse suspicions in that stern mind; for he felt that his life would not be worth an hour's purchase if a glimmer of the truth entered the heart of the forester.

"Is this the only approach to your stronghold?" he asked, with assumed calmness.

"Could we ask for a better one?" responded Laval, with triumph. "Three men, stationed at the different bends on this pathway, can defy the approach of a regiment. I can not help thinking that the great Father saw the need his children would have for this ark of refuge, and he fashioned it throughout all the ages of creation, and built up a wall

of rock around it to preserve it from profane eyes, until the hour arrived in which it was needed. Then he revealed it to the faithful; and verily, if our hearts were not broken by suffering, great would be the pleasure we might take in the beautiful adornments of this subterranean palace. Go forward first, if you please, M. Ferron. I will assist M. Lefevre, who is older than we, and fatigued with his walk. I would advise you to keep your eyes from glancing down the abyss, as it might give you an inclination to topple over. In the narrowest part you will find lichens, to which you may cling to steady yourself and gain breath for a moment."

Laval pointed forward, with the air of one who intended to be obeyed; and, with a palpitating heart and most unwilling feet, Ferron moved forward. M. Lefevre followed, walking with an air of dreamy abstraction, as if his thoughts were far away; and even the sublime scene amidst which he stood had little power to recall them to passing realities. Laval kept as near to him as possible; ready, if he made a false step, to lend the aid of his strong arm in sustaining him upon the pathway.

Day had dawned clear and tranquil; and, as they rounded the last curve in the road, the waterfall was visible far below them, throwing out jets of foam and leaping from ledge to ledge; now flashing in the light, and then lost amidst the Alpine plants that lined the ravine. In its lowest depths all was darkness. A rock, that was displaced from the path, went plunging down, but it sent back no crashing echo from its fall; the distance was too great, though the eye could follow it in its downward career.

Suddenly Lefevre paused; and, looking upward to the azure arch that spanned the hills, said,

"Behold in those clear blue depths the type of that which we aspire to, if we are true to the teachings of the Man God; and there," pointing toward the abyss beneath, "is also a type of that blackness of darkness into which that soul shall be plunged that denies the evidences of the spirit, and refuses to obey the commands of the Most High God."

Ferron paused to hearken to his words, and his lip curled with contemptuous scorn as he muttered,

"A fine spot for preaching, truly, when it is as much as a man's life is worth to take his eyes off the narrow line he must walk in. I suppose this, too, is a type of the narrow path they talk so much about, though it's far enough from being straight, and I am quite sure it does not lead to heaven."

In a few more moments they reached the opening in front of the cave, and Laval uttered a shrill cry, which was the signal of the approach of a friend. The sentinel on duty grounded his musket, and permitted them to pass. A cordial greeting between himself and the forester evinced his pleasure in seeing him safe again, and he said,

"Your wife has been nearly frantic at your long stay; but the girl is of better stuff, and she insisted that you would return in safety."

A frown gathered on the brow of Laval, but the sternness gradually melted into a softer feeling, and he muttered,

"Poor Annette, she is not made of the metal to bear what has come upon us. It is only souls of iron that can win through the sea of trouble into which we are plunged."

He passed first into the cave, which presented much the same scene which has been before described. Some of the men were reading; others walked to and fro, like caged lions, chafing with impatience, in the narrow bounds that confined them. Ferron was unknown to any of them; but M. Lefevre, as a conspicuous Protestant proprietor, was immediately recognized. They gathered around him with expressions of sympathy; and when he related the causes that drove him hither, deep and heartfelt were the execrations that arose against the perpetrators of such outrage.

Laval left them and sought his wife. The poor lunatic, Fifine, offered to show him the nook Annette had chosen in which to establish herself. They left the outer apartment, and entered the hall of statues. Wan figures arose on all

sides, with every variety of drapery flowing from their gigantic proportions. Seen by the flickering and imperfect light of a few scattered torches, they looked like a convention of antique sages, in their robes of state, collected there in solemn conclave to decide on some question of momentous import.

This hall was larger than the one they had left, and it seemed filled with that silent and solemn assemblage which brought to mind the tales of the old necromancers, who by supernatural means were enabled to lay a spell upon those who fell within their baleful power. Near its centre arose an altar, of pure white, supported by a gigantic hand, that seemed to rise from the floor and grasp the slender shaft that rested upon it, as perfectly poised as if a skillful architect had adapted it to its position. On either hand floating drapery fell from it in folds of such airy delicacy as to seem ready to be displaced by a breath.

An open Bible rested upon the shaft, showing that it had already been appropriated as a place of worship by the refugees.

Laval, bewildered by the weird scene, passed on after his guide, until they reached the farthest extremity of the vast hall. There an irregularly-shaped recess, about fifteen feet long and nearly as wide, was screened from observation by a falling sheet of stalactite, on which two figures in the act of embracing seemed rudely traced in the bas-relief. In this he found his wife and child, stretched upon a bed of dried leaves, covered with the clothing left in the ravine two nights before, which one of Laval's friends had risked his life to regain for her use.

Madame Laval lay pale and exhausted, completely broken down by the mental anguish of the last few hours. The boy was sleeping quietly beside her, but it was evident that he, too, had suffered from the indisposition of his mother. Lucille sat beside them, holding the hand of Madame Laval in her own. It thrilled and trembled with nervous excitement, for in this phantom-hall she could only sleep while

the warm clasp of her daughter assured her that some living and breathing form was near her.

Lucille looked inexpressibly sad. The shadow of a dark presentiment was on her, and she prayed for strength to fortify her child-soul for the moment of thrilling terror and fatal doom which arose as a dim and undefined horror before her. Nature bestows upon a few of her children, of finer organization, a subtle instinct, which enables them vaguely to foreshadow the future—especially if that future be charged with clouds of evil; and to such belonged this young girl.

The approach of her father was felt before she saw him. For one brief instant her heart bounded with a glad welcome, and then sunk like a mass of lead in her bosom. A cold thrill sent its icy shiver through her veins, as he laid his hand upon her shoulder and called her by the pet name he bestowed upon her only in his blandest moods.

"Pétite, you look almost as ghastly as those stone figures out there, and your mother seems as if she had been ill a month. Fie! this will never do. If we begin by despairing, how must it end with us?"

The girl raised her large sad eyes to his, and said,

"We feared for your safety; that is why we seem so downcast, father."

The sound of his voice aroused his wife from her half-dreaming state, and she languidly unclosed her eyes.

"Dear Jean, is that you? Oh, such a weight is lifted from my poor heart by your return! The baby is not well; and I believe, if I am compelled to stay in this dreadful place, with all those stony figures looking like ghosts, I shall die. They make me afraid. It seems like a place for the dead people that can't rest in their graves."

The stern soul of Laval, moved by such a whirlwind of emotion as had lately swept through it, could find little sympathy for this species of nervous terror; the querulous tones of his wife's voice annoyed him, and he hastily said,

"Annette, this is both silly and sinful. Where could

Providence have pointed out to us a refuge of such grand proportions, or one better calculated to inspire the heart with gratitude for the goodness of Heaven? Rouse yourself, woman, and look at things through their true medium. If your resolution fails thus, when the hour of rescue comes you will be unable to avail yourself of it."

"I shall never leave this place," was the desponding reply. "I knew, when you brought me over that dreadful way, that I should never go back. No, Jean, you may make my grave here, for here I shall die."

The maniac had seated herself at the foot of the bed, and she swung her body to and fro as she said, in a low, chanting tone,

"Why do you murmur? Why do you murmur, when you have your baby on your breast; the strong arm of your husband to defend you; the heart of your daughter to lean on? Oh, ungrateful soul, ungrateful soul, to whom God has spared your loved ones in vain! Rise up and thank Him for mercy, even amidst tribulation."

At this strange address Madame Laval lifted her head and gazed shudderingly at the wretched creature who thus reproved her.

"And *that* is what the faithful come to?" she asked. "Why can not God do better for his own? or, are we truly his own? If we are, why this suffering? why this desolation? Oh, strange doubts come to me, and I do not know how to answer them!"

At these words the face of Laval grew almost terrible. His frame shook with suppressed emotion as he knelt beside the couch and took the cold hand of his wife in his own. He impressively said,

"Annette, in the time of health and strength the words of living truth, taught you from your infancy, were never doubted; and now, in the imbecility of fear and sickness, they shall not be. Cast those doubts away, I command you, and ask of Christ forgiveness for having harbored them. Even this trial of faith may come to you, Annette; and

should you then prove untrue—should you even waver, then may God help you, for I never will. I will cast you from me as a worthless weed, no longer worthy of a place in the heart of a man who deserves the name. I pardoned the child because she is young and timid; but you—you, the wife of my bosom, the mother of my children—oh, it is very, very different!” and the stern voice faltered with emotion.

Madame Laval was roused from her supineness by this impassioned appeal. She clasped his hands in both her own, and said,

“It was the doubt of a moment. I *do* believe, Jean, with all my heart; and I promise you that I will perish before I will prove untrue to the faith by which I have lived.”

“Ask for strength to keep your promise, where alone it can be found,” he said, as he arose abruptly and plunged into the obscurity beyond. He presently came toward the altar, and there he found M. Lefevre, surrounded by many of the inmates of the cavern, making ready for morning worship. He then remembered that it was the Sabbath, and he endeavored to compose his mind for the duties of the day.

Torches were brought in, and disposed in such a manner as to throw the glare of light upon the space immediately around the altar. Then the most singular and interesting portion of this exquisite work of nature became visible. Suspended above it was an irregular canopy, crowned by a broken mitre, from which a dove was springing forth with outstretched wings, as if ready to soar heavenward, yet held down, wounded and partially crushed, by the weight of the ecclesiastical crown from which it had failed to escape.

“Behold the visible emblem of our faith, struggling to rescue itself from the fangs of Rome!” said M. Lefevre, pointing upward. “My friends, from this heaven-built altar my voice will be first raised as an accredited disciple of our Father’s cause; and I hail it as an omen of good to me that my steps have been led thither.”

Such refreshment as their scanty stores afforded had al-

ready been offered to the new-comers, and, excited by the strange scene around him, M. Lefevre felt strong to undertake the novel duty before him. He entered the unique pulpit, and opened the service by reading a portion of Scripture. He then gave out the opening lines of one of the soul-stirring hymns sung by the Huguenots in their places of worship. His voice was one of fine power, and he commenced the strain himself. The others joined in; and those hidden in different parts of the cavern, who had not yet been informed of what was going on, took it up as they came winding through the dim arcades toward the illuminated point near its centre.

The thrilling anthem echoed through the vast dome, and seemed to die away in depths yet unexplored. The singers involuntarily paused, at the close of each verse, and listened to the fading strain, sounding as if a seraph-band had caught each cadence as it arose, and were wafting it away, away to the spirit-land.

Then the pastor prayed fervently, and many a tear-stained cheek bore witness to the tender eloquence of the pleader. His text was, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden;" and from it he addressed to them a brief appeal, suited to their circumstances, and calculated to bring their sore hearts with loving confidence to the feet of the Redeemer.

A picture for an artist gifted with the highest inspiration of genius would that striking scene have made. The men, with their wasted and strongly-marked features and worn vestments, leaning in every variety of attitude against the gigantic forms that cast their shadows around; the women and children, grouped together upon the floor—many of the former possessing a delicate beauty which showed that hardship was new to them—and the infant faces looking up with awe-struck expression to the white-haired man, who spoke to them of "a home not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," where persecution nor want should ever reach them.

At the close of the sermon the choral hymn again arose, and amidst its dying echoes the benediction was given. Thanks and blessings followed the steps of the newly-initiated minister as he descended among them again; and when busy hands prepared for him a comfortable place of repose, he felt that it is blessed both to give and to receive.

While this scene passed, Ferron lingered near enough to hear all that was said, but with an intense longing to escape from this phantom-like prison, and from association with men whom he regarded as religious enthusiasts, to scenes and places more congenial to him. He already execrated his own stupidity in not making sure of the two most important prisoners while they were completely in his power, without subjecting himself to the ordeal he must now undergo.

Ferron felt sure of his own powers of deception, and knew that in time he could win so far upon the confidence of his companions as to be intrusted with the important post of sentinel. Then, at all hazards, he would effect his escape; but, in the mean time, weary days of waiting and watching must elapse.

It then occurred to him that it would be advisable to explore the cave; some other outlet might be found which would not only afford him egress to the world without, but would serve as the means of entrance to those commissioned to destroy this nest of pestilent heretics.

In pursuance of this plan, Ferron prowled around for many hours every day, when he could, without suspicion, separate himself from the others. He sought out the various nooks in which the stores belonging to the different families were kept, and appropriated wax candles, of which he gradually accumulated a sufficient quantity for the purpose he had in view. Among the refugees were several families formerly the possessors of wealth and high position, and their relatives in the city contrived to supply them with a few luxuries in addition to the necessary articles which were sent. Laval, and three others well ac-

quainted with the country, went forth twice each week, at the risk of being taken, to receive these supplies from persons commissioned to bring them to certain points among the hills.

A week passed away before Ferron was prepared to put his scheme in execution, and he found the monotony of his life almost insupportable. Morning and evening services were held; but after the novelty of the first one, they became inexpressibly tedious to him. He had rendered himself very popular with his fellow-sufferers by relating to them a most touching history of persecution, which owed its origin entirely to his own fertile imagination; and fair cheeks had paled, and tears had glittered in bright eyes over his afflictions and hair-breadth escapes.

But none of these things interested him; he yearned after the free air, and the unbridled indulgence permitted by that Church to which his vices wedded him. In his heart he despised these simple believers, and stigmatized them as canting, psalm-singing fools, who made a purgatory of the only life they were sure would be granted to them—for Ferron cherished strong doubts as to the reality of any future existence.

During this time M. Lefevre became anxious to escape by the same means used by the pastor; and Laval had endeavored to open a communication with the guide who took charge of him, but his efforts had hitherto proved unsuccessful. If he could reach Geneva in safety, from there the way to Holland through the German States would be open to him, and he could join his son. Such was now the most fervent desire of his heart; together they would seek a new home, in which, in time, he trusted all the broken links of his household might be reunited.

Books were not wanting among the more intelligent of the refugees; and concealed in that subterranean dwelling were men of brilliant minds and high cultivation, driven forth from their possessions because of the very superiority of their endowments. The clear mind that could detect

evil, and the courageous tongue that denounced it, were considered dangerous by those whose only means of retaining their unrighteous power was to fetter the intellect, and repress the spirit of inquiry beneath an iron despotism more to be deprecated than the irresponsible power of the mightiest autocrat that has ever lived; for the mystery of the unknown future awes the superstitious soul which would battle bravely with any tangible earthly ill, but sinks at once before the threatened wrath of him who is to judge the earth.

All the refugees were only awaiting an opportunity to escape to some Protestant country, where they could live by their own labor in freedom and peace. Madame Laval was better, but was still feeble and nervous, and afraid to move about without her daughter beside her. She would sit for hours with her child playing at her feet, her eyes fixed on vacancy, and it was difficult to believe that the active, sprightly housewife she had so lately been should sink into this apathetic state of endurance. With her daily cares her interest in life seemed to have departed, and nothing now had power to move her save the voice of her infant. His cries she hushed with tender care, and her very existence seemed bound up in his welfare.

Laval was touched by her condition, and he was more tender than he had ever been since their bridal days; but she received his caresses passively, and at moments he turned with sad yearning toward his daughter for that sympathy of which he had never before felt the need. Even there he felt that a barrier had raised itself up which he could neither comprehend nor remove.

Lucille was affectionate, grateful for his renewed kindness, but there was a latent constraint she could not overcome in spite of all her efforts to do so. Even when clasped to his breast, a trembling fear thrilled through her, and bade her flee from him even to the uttermost parts of the earth if she would avoid the fate he had foretold for her—that terrible fate which, in her deep soul, she felt was drawing near its consummation.

Ferron inquired why the cave had not been farther explored, and was told that no outlet had yet been discovered, and it was believed that none existed. Nothing daunted by this, when the others were buried in sleep, he arose, supplied himself with food, a tinder-box, and a light. With stealthy steps he glided among the tall statues, which seemed to frown in silent majesty upon his treacherous undertaking.

For three successive nights he sounded the walls, and examined every crevice without much encouragement to proceed, but on the fourth one his perseverance was rewarded by discovering a low opening concealed behind a large boulder that had fallen over it. With difficulty he forced his body through the aperture, and on rising and surveying the scene before him he found himself in a small chamber cumbered with broken and discolored masses that seemed to have fallen from the roof; and the walls partook of the same dusky hue, strikingly in contrast with the pure whiteness found in the outer chambers.

The feeble light he carried seemed only to make the darkness beyond the more palpable to him, and for an instant his courage failed; but he remembered all he had at stake, and stumbled on over the fragments of rock that incumbered the ground, almost obstructing the way. Ferron possessed a tenacious memory for localities, and to this, and a few precautions he came prepared to take, he trusted to be able to retrace his steps should he find no outlet.

He had appropriated a ball of strong cord, the end of which he fastened securely to a jagged point of rock that jutted over the side of a low, dark avenue, which he chose in preference to two others that opened from different points, because it enabled him to proceed in a more direct line with the chambers he left behind him. The passage he entered varied in width from six to ten feet, and was barely high enough for him to walk erect.

He slowly proceeded, unwinding his ball as he went, and taking care that the uneven points in the wall did not sever

the clew. The passage was rough and tortuous, but in no place interrupted; and he cautiously went on for several hundred yards, in great elation at the success which had thus far attended him. Suddenly the avenue seemed to close before him, but by making a careful examination he found that a loose mass of stone had fallen and obstructed the way.

Placing his candle in a safe place, he set resolutely to work to remove the obstacle. Several times both strength and courage almost failed him, but after pausing to regain breath, he persevered until he opened a space sufficiently wide to pass through. A few more yards brought him to the entrance of a vast chamber, of more strange and striking appearance than those he had left behind him.

Opposite to the point of ingress arose a vast white expanse, ascending farther than the dim light could reach, and extending on either hand far into the obscurity beyond. Its irregular surface gave it, to his imagination, the appearance of a great white throne, on which sat one whose majesty was veiled in the clouds and darkness above. White figures were also scattered through the wide space, and two, just in front of the throne, had wings, which looked as if they had partially folded in descending to their present position.

As Ferron stood awe-struck before it, he heard the sounds of trickling water, and on venturing nearer, he saw that a narrow stream flowed perpetually over it, clear, cold, and sparkling; and the habitual scoffing of his nature arose even amidst that striking scene. "If those fanatics could see this, they would liken it at once to the stream of grace perpetually flowing from the mercy of God—though it is my opinion that they have found only the waters of Marah as yet."

Several hours were spent in finding an opening from this vast saloon, and Ferron recoiled at first from its entrance; for a gash of cold air met him, which almost extinguished his light. He paused, and nerving his courage anew, care-

fully sheltered his torch and stepped down a rough descent, broken into irregular steps. From these the ground sloped gradually away, and he went on, sometimes forced to stoop and crawl through places barely large enough to permit the body of a man to pass.

Ferron was more than an hour getting through this avenue, and at its end was an abrupt fall of about fifteen feet, at the bottom of which flowed a narrow, dark stream of water. He sat down despondingly upon the edge of this, for here he concluded his pilgrimage must end; and nothing remained for him but to retrace his steps and remain in the cave until fortune favored his escape.

Wishing to obtain a better view of the scene, he took out all the candles he had brought, and, lighting them, placed them in the crevices around. By the increased illumination, he saw that the rocky eminence on which he sat could be easily descended; and the thought no sooner occurred to him than he put it in execution. Sliding down, he reached the lowest ledge in safety, and this projected so far into the stream that he was enabled easily to sound its depth. He threw a small stone, and the sharp sound it made in falling, and the splashing of the water, assured him that it was only a few inches deep. The wall on the opposite side could be scaled, he felt sure, and he again mounted the first embankment to secure his lights.

This done, Ferron left his torch as a beacon to guide him back, and, cutting a hole in the top of his hat, he placed the only candle he kept burning in that, thus leaving both hands free for use. In another moment he was wading through the cold water, which scarcely reached above his ankles. It was a work of more difficulty to ascend on the opposite side; but he scrambled up with the resolute determination not to be defeated, and soon stood in another wide, dreary opening, that seemed to lead to infinity.

His clew had long since been exhausted, and he be-thought him of some substitute by which to mark his way, for to return now without having accomplished something

was not to be thought of. He searched his pockets, and found several letters; torn into strips, and left at intervals on his route, they would serve as landmarks by which to retrace his steps, and between every space of ten paces he laid one down.

He had proceeded about a quarter of a mile from the stream, when he suddenly stumbled and caught his foot in some obstruction that seemed to grasp it with human force. He looked down, and cold drops burst from his brow as he saw that it was a skull which his tread had crushed through the centre, and the whitened bones on either side of the head held him in their ghastly clasp.

Ferron kicked the skull violently away, and moving a few paces farther, sat down to recover himself. To whom had that skull belonged? Some wanderer like himself, who had been lost amidst the mazes of the cavern, and perished in darkness and of famine? Or had his body been placed there by those who violently dismissed the subtle tenant from its prison-house, and thus sought to conceal the crime?

Ferron remembered that on gaining the bank on this side of the stream he had carefully surveyed the one on the opposite shore, that he might mark the spot from which he emerged with sufficient accuracy to find it again should his torch expire before his return. A rocky projection which jutted from above completely shut it from view, and but for his knowledge that such an outlet existed he should have felt assured that there was no egress from that quarter.

The irresistible conclusion was, that the wanderer who had found death in this awful place must have come from an opposite direction, and he arose with renewed courage. He stepped more cautiously than before, and threw the light before him to see if another skeleton form obstructed the way. He now found evidences that the place had been visited before, for a distinct path was opened between the fragments of rock that were scattered about, apparently in a direct line forward.

On one huge boulder he found some fragments of food, which sent a strange thrill of feeling through him, and furnished him with a clew to his whereabouts. There lay a few pieces of bread, dried and crumbling away; and the fragments of a cup, which might have been dashed in despair upon the stone that was scarcely harder than the hearts which had left one of their own kind to perish in this outer darkness.

Ferron knew that the convent of the Sisters of Mercy was situated in this direction, and he had often heard mysterious whispers of the vaults below it, which communicate with natural caverns beneath the hills, where the contumacious were left to perish. He now went on, with confidence that an outlet would soon be found that would be available to one who was the bearer of such welcome tidings to the abbot.

About fifty paces farther on, the opening ended against what appeared at first view to be a dead wall; but a little examination enabled the wanderer to see that the opening had been artificially closed, and in the rough partition constructed by human labor a low door was soon spied by his eager eyes. It yielded to a vigorous push, and he entered a spacious chamber evidently fitted up as a hall of judgment. The walls were hung with black, and the seats of the inquisitors were covered with the same sombre pall; while the chair intended for the use of the culprit was made to represent flames of fire, with serpents coiled among them, their raised heads and forked tongues seeming ready to dart their venom into the miserable being who was thrust into their embrace.

Ferron shuddered as he looked around, for he knew that from this dreary place the victim was cast forth into the dark void beyond to perish by the slow tortures of famine.

Crossing this gloomy hall, he found egress through a vaulted passage, from which doors opened on either side; these, he supposed, were the prisons of those not yet actually condemned. This passage was about a hundred feet long;

and as Ferron passed along he more than once heard groans from the wretched beings confined in the cells, condemned never again to behold the light of day, unless it was purchased by that pure light of faith which was dearer to them than life itself.

At the end of the passage was an iron grating securely fastened; and satisfied with the result of his enterprise, Ferron yielded to the fatigue to which excitement had hitherto rendered him insensible. He sank down on the pavement, and was soon buried in a profound sleep, which lasted several hours.

From this he was aroused by the flashing of a light upon his face, and he suddenly arose before the astonished nun who came to dole out the daily allowance of bread and water that barely sufficed to keep life in her wretched captives.

"Holy Mary!" exclaimed the terrified woman, crossing herself; "who are you? and how did a man come to be imprisoned in our convent?"

"I am not a prisoner, Madame," replied Ferron; "but how I came hither I can only tell the Lady Superior herself. Bring me into her presence as speedily as possible, and I promise you a rich reward for the service; for you will afford aid to a mission of vast importance to the Abbot of the Dominicans."

"Are you sure you are telling me the truth?" she asked; "though how you got here is more than I can tell, unless you are in league with the Evil One."

"It matters not how I came here; your business is to get me out and bring me before the abbess, to whom I can satisfactorily account for my presence in these vaults."

"I dare not; I must first speak with the superior, and learn what I shall do."

"I warn you to speak to her alone, for I am an agent of Father Antoine, and it is essential to his plans that my presence here shall be known to as few persons as possible. Stay, I have paper and pencil in my pocket, and I will write a line to the superior explaining what is necessary."

He hastily scribbled a few words on the back of a letter, which, after some delay, had the effect of bringing him into the presence of Father Antoine himself. He had visited the convent at an early hour, to receive the confession of several fair penitents, and was in consultation with the superior when the nun came in with the paper, and the incredible revelation that a strange man had been found in the vaults beneath the convent.

The abbot was aware of the departure of Ferron for the hills, and the days that had since elapsed, with no information from his emissary, had rendered him seriously uneasy as to his fate. On reading the words written by Ferron, his acute mind at once grasped the right conclusion, and he said, "The vaults must be the outlet to the cave in which the heretics have found a refuge, that has hitherto baffled the keenest search. Should it prove so, and these intractable fanatics be delivered over to us; I shall regard it as a signal interposition of Providence to punish them for their rebellion. I will not hesitate to exterminate them as I would a nest of vipers. Hasten, Sister Cecile, and bring this man before me; but, above all, keep a discreet tongue in your head, and let no one know from you of his presence here."

The nun readily promised obedience, and the superior left the abbot to receive his agent alone. On listening to Ferron's recital, a plan was rapidly formed in his own mind to insure the destruction of the unfortunate refugees; and his eyes sparkled with gratified malice as their names were called over, for they comprised many of the most influential and uncompromising in Languedoc.

The Duc de Noailles was absent in Paris; and during his temporary stay his power was transferred to D'Aguesseau, in whom the abbot knew he would find a willing co-worker in the cruel slaughter he meditated. Accompanied by Ferron, he departed at once for Nismes, and lost no time in making his report to the intendant.

D'Aguesseau entered with zest into the plan proposed

by the priest. Under the guidance of Ferron, a body of armed men were to follow the route he had taken, and surprise the inmates of the cavern. Orders were issued to Captain Delmont to blockade the mountain pass leading over the hills, to prevent the escape of the Huguenots on that side ; while a party of thirty picked men, under Sergeant Pierre Lefond, the same who had been stationed in the Chateau Lefevre, were dispatched with Ferron, with orders to exterminate without distinction all found in the cave, with the exception of M. Lefevre and the family of Laval. These were to be made captives, as it was necessary to make them examples to those who still refused to become proselytes to the Romish faith.



CHAPTER XV.

EUGENIA ALTENBERG had now been a week in the convent of the Sisters of Mercy, and so charmed was she with her new home, that she seemed already reconciled to the idea of continuing in its peaceful seclusion for the rest of her life. Possessing an ardent and enthusiastic temperament, united with great veneration for what is noble and imposing, the antique origin and stately ceremonies of the Romish Church inspired her with a strong desire to conform to its requirements, provided they were not utterly at variance with the simple code of purity and truth taught in the Scriptures.

Under the skillful guidance of the abbot, and the fascinating influence of the superior, Mademoiselle Altenberg was rapidly becoming a strong believer in the tenets of Catholicism. She no longer wavered in her faith; for the subtle arguments of her teachers induced her to believe that she had at last found a resting-point for her doubts in the infallibility of that Church of which she had hitherto been merely a nominal member.

Father Antoine came daily to read and converse with her; for, aside from the interested motives he had in view in making her a sincere proselyte, a deeper feeling began to make itself felt in the heart of this man, who had hitherto proved too cold to the passion of love. Secure in his own strength, he interpreted the deep interest Eugenia inspired into Christian benevolence toward a young creature without protection and without a home, whose immortal soul was in danger of being forever lost if he rescued it not from perdition.

As a young daughter the priest believed he regarded her, and as such he daily sought her. He would not remember that the light of her eyes, when lifted to his face in inquiry,

thrilled him with an emotion that was quite new to him ; that the tones of her voice dwelt in his memory as sounds of sweetest melody, to be recalled in the solitude of his own apartments, and dwelt on with feelings as delicious as they were new.

There was an inexplicable charm about this young girl, that drew him toward her as with bonds of iron ; and day by day the spell deepened, until the professed religionaire was compelled to ask himself what must come of it. Then the subtle spirit of his creed came to his aid, and he said, "To the pure in heart all things are pure;" and there can be no sin in loving this girl, provided I have strength to keep the knowledge of my affection from its object. Till now, I could not comprehend the wanderings of the heart ; for mine has never before been tempted ; but I will overcome temptation—I will regard Eugenia only as a holy father in the Church may regard a daughter. Truly, the difference in our years would naturally place us in that position toward each other.

Reassured by this reasoning, the abbot made his daily visit to the convent ; and came back to retire to his private apartment, to compare the living loveliness from which he had lately parted with the inanimate forms that lined its walls ; and to feel that one glance from the beaming eyes of Eugenia Altenberg,—one motion of her delicate hand, possessed for him more fascination than them all.

She was far less beautiful than any of the faces that looked down on him ; but there are some women gifted with the power to charm, and this young girl was one of that class. Simplicity, truth, and candor were stamped upon variable features to which expression gave an indefinable attraction. From the lucid depths of her eyes beamed a soul of sensibility, and the exquisitely-carved lips became tremulous with emotion if the finer cords of the spirit were touched. There was refinement in every graceful movement of her person, in every modulation of her flexible voice.

In a word, Eugenia Altenberg was a woman formed by

nature to be the charm of her home—the living sunbeam to the heart that was so fortunate as to win her affections; and all this feminine loveliness was to be buried in a convent. But what did the heart of Eugenia itself say to such a destiny? As yet she had not asked herself that question; for the probability of such a fate had scarcely risen before her as a tangible reality. She regarded herself as a mere sojourner in the convent; at liberty at any moment to seek the outer world, but happier in this secure seclusion than she had ever before been since the light-hearted days of early childhood.

Her attachment to Gerauld Lefevre scarcely offered an obstacle to her profession as a nun; for absence, and uncertainty as to their ever meeting again, had caused it to fade into a tender interest, very different from the love she was as capable of feeling as of inspiring. Gerauld and herself had been thrown together in daily association when the child-spirit was just merging into that of the woman. He was in the flush of early and undisciplined manhood, and he gave her all the impassioned devotion of his years. He knew that no other love could ever so deeply influence his heart as this first and purest attachment, and she felt that in the maturity of her feelings she might worthily return it; but troubles arose; their difference in faith seemed an insurmountable barrier; and although Gerauld found means to continue their correspondence through all the years of separation, the conviction had slowly settled around the heart of his betrothed that their future union was impossible.

Such was the state of Eugenia's feelings when she fell under the influence of Father Antoine. He was far too politic to bring forward the authority of the Church; he left that to be felt when she was securely bound beneath its yoke. All that is noble and grand in the system of religious faith he advocated was developed to her inquiring mind. Such works as taught only pure evangelical piety were placed in her hands, and he trusted to the natural tendency of an enthusiastic mind to accomplish the rest.

In those days, when theological disputes shook society to its very centre—when vital religious faith was a matter of paramount importance in the estimation of the more earnest spirits of the times, the influence it exerted upon human destiny was far greater than can be appreciated in our days, and in a country where every man is free to choose his own mode of worshipping God. In the times of Louis XIV., might and right struggled fiercely for the victory; and, as is so often the case on our misguided earth, the former gained it. But God mercifully kept life in the smothered flame, and when it was quenched in one spot it burst forth in another, and gradually spread its revivifying light over the nations; thus preserving the true spirit of Christian faith in spite of the superstitions of that great fabric of moral darkness, the Church of Rome.

And into *this* the daughter of a true believer entered as one seeking light; and she was soon taught to believe that she had found it in the sacred fountain of everlasting truth. That this fountain was poisoned at its source Eugenia had yet to learn, under circumstances that would reveal to her all the hollowness of that artificial fabric, alike at variance with truth and nature.

In the mean time, life in the convent seemed a very pleasant pastime to the sisters. Those of the higher order were the daughters of noble families, who had received such advantages of education as the times afforded; and the library devoted to their use was by no means restricted to works of exclusive religious tendency. The literature of past and present times contributed to its variety; and the nuns themselves were encouraged to cultivate a taste for letters and the arts as the most innocent means of employing their leisure. Musicians of great merit were to be found among them, and several of them were by no means contemptible as artists.

In both these accomplishments the young neophyte had attained some proficiency. Her voice was one of such rare and flexible power, as would naturally be the organ of a

spirit endowed with the refined susceptibility that glowed in the changing cheek, and beamed in the luminous eyes of Eugenia. Charmed by the melody of her untutored notes, the superior herself volunteered to become her musical instructor. This Eugenia gratefully accepted; and the two practiced together every morning, singing not only the music of the Church, but melodies which had never been heard within its sacred precincts.

Sister Angela, the next in authority to the superior, also won the heart of the young girl by the deep interest she manifested in her, and by offering her the use of a room in the top of the building, which she had been permitted to fit up as a studio. An enthusiast in her art, Sister Angela really cared nothing for the world beyond the walls in which she could create forms of beauty that charmed her eye, and satisfied all the requirements of her calm heart. The hopes, impulses, and passions of youth had been swept away, bearing with them into the dark vortex of the past the memories of her young life as a delusion and a snare; and no better agent could have been selected by the abbot to give Eugenia a bright impression of conventual life.

It seemed as if the tastes bestowed on her by nature contributed to throw her more completely into their snares, for of her endowments the talent for painting was the one whose cultivation afforded her most pleasure. She was permitted to spend many hours of every day with Sister Angela, receiving instruction from her, by which she rapidly profited; and she soon became charmed with her own progress in her beautiful art.

The nun excelled in painting female heads, and those familiar with her touch would at once have recognized the origin of many of the lovely faces that adorned the walls of the abbot's sanctum.

There was a school attached to the convent, which the superior and the nuns of higher rank superintended; but the real burden devolved on the poorer sisters, who had been received into the establishment on the condition of laboring for

their support. These women often looked careworn and weary ; but the new inmate was not permitted to come into actual contact with them, lest their revelations might destroy the ideal image of peaceful repose conventual life was assuming in her imagination.

Eugenia ardently desired to be good, holy, and pure ; and here, where she believed temptation could never assail her, she might grow up to the full stature and perfection of womanhood, by cultivating only what was noble and true in her nature—looking ever to God as her helper, and His approbation as her reward. Thus believing herself encircled by a halo of divine light, she walked surely forward into the power of darkness.

But Madame Altenberg was by no means so well contented as her daughter ; she possessed no resources within herself, and she soon became irritable and impatient under the monotonous regularity of the life she led. She urged the abbot to prosecute their claims with such rigor as to enable them speedily to re-enter the world. She had a vision of Paris floating before her—of the splendors of court life, to which she might aspire if her daughter's fortune could only be secured ; for she herself was of ancient family, and claimed a near connection with one of the nobles about the person of the king.

These idle expectations served to occupy her vacant mind, while they, at the same time, rendered her impatient of the life she now endured. The abbot amused her with hopes of being speedily restored to affluence, leaving an explanation of her true position to be made when the fate of her daughter was entirely at his disposal, as he cherished not the slightest doubt it soon would be. Then the future of Madame Altenberg would be of as little concern to him as that of the dead autumn leaf whirled about at the mercy of every blast. She might go or stay as suited her inclinations best.

One bright evening, as the sun was declining in a glow of purple and gold, the superior invited Eugenia to ascend

with her to an observatory with which the convent was crowned. By this time the affectionate heart of the young girl had become warmly attached to this graceful and fascinating woman, and she gratefully accepted the invitation.

The evening was mild and tranquil, and the air seemed filled with that fine blue haze peculiar to mountain scenery. The convent was several miles from Nismes ; but its position on so great an elevation commanded a view of the whole valley, with the city in the distance, over which a cloud of luminous vapor rested.

Her companion gave Eugenia time to examine the various points in the view, and enjoy them before she spoke. She then pointed to the city, and impressively said,

"There are found turmoil, struggle, and sorrow ; here dwell peace, repose, and love to God and man. Which is the preferable destiny, do you think, my young friend?"

"Oh! the last, madame—the last. But tell me if the heart never yearns to go back to active life ; if the simple nature within us does not prompt us to weary in well-doing. I am happy here now, because I am like the storm-tossed mariner who has found a haven ; but it may not always be thus. This quiet life may pall—may become tedious. Tell me, dear mother, if such has been your experience."

The superior fixed her expressive eyes upon the earnest face turned toward her, but no feeling of relenting moved her to save one she was resolute to bring within her toils. She calmly said,

"You have only to look into my face, Eugenia, to behold there the evidences of a nature far more excitable and willful than you possess ; and I assure you that, after a varied worldly experience, the only happiness I have ever found has been within the walls of this convent. Would that, like you, I had found an asylum here ere wordly sin and crushing sorrow had destroyed the flower of my life, and left only the broken remnant of a blighted existence to devote to the service of Heaven."

"Your experience must have been a strange and hard one," said the young girl, timidly, but with sympathy beaming from her eyes.

"Yes; hard, but not strange. The victims of life are many; for Fate is inexorable to her children. Oh, my daughter, there are depths of passion and suffering in the human heart which for you, I trust, may never be sounded; for you are becoming as dear to me, Eugenia, as was that child I once clasped to my heart and called my own. But my sin against Heaven had been great, and God snatched the pure blossom from my side, to join the seraph band that waits around his throne."

In her earnest sympathy, Eugenia drew nearer, and took the hand of the superior in her own. She softly said,

"You, then, have been a wife—a mother; and yet you have found the brightest happiness in conventual life? Ah! I once thought that a peaceful, domestic home is the true sphere of woman."

The abbess pressed her hand upon her brow, and seemed lost in thought. She presently said,

"Eugenia, it is my sincere conviction that in the world happiness is not to be found. To woman in any sphere there is only a choice of evils; for if she loves, she must become the slave of man's caprice and ingratitude. If wedded from ambitious motives, she must loathe the bondage from which her very heart recoils."

"It is not absolutely necessary to marry," suggested Mademoiselle Altenberg. "Many women remain single."

"Yes; and those who are wise among that number seek a secure asylum, like the one we now inhabit. It is the safest, the truest life, after all."

"And such are really the convictions of your judgment?" asked Eugenia, anxiously.

The superior regarded her earnestly. She laid her hand on that of the questioner, and said,

"If you were to hear the history of one who can from experience speak of the two destinies of woman, do you be-

lieve it would influence you to make that last choice of which I spoke? to find peace ere yet the sunshine of your life is clouded over?"

"It may. I know not. I have little experience of life: let me benefit by that of another so far as I may."

"Poor child!" and the speaker sighed heavily; "if my history can become a warning, you shall hear it. Eugenia, it is a strange tissue, and shows of how little worth are the best gifts of Heaven to those who are still dissatisfied and grasp for more, when more than enough has already been granted. The only child of wealthy parents, I knew not contradiction as I grew to womanhood. Passionate, capricious, and overbearing, I was given, while yet almost a child, in marriage to one many years my senior, toward whom I cherished not one emotion of affection or respect. I acquiesced in this union, because my pride was flattered at becoming the wife of a man still higher in rank, and of greater wealth than my father possessed.

"Thus the position which should have bestowed the right of choice among those of my own years, where mutual love might have given zest to life, was made a stepping-stone to a marriage of ambition, hallowed by not one emotion that should move those entering upon that condition. Charmed by my beauty, my husband spoiled me in the first months of our union; and when my haughty spirit, encouraged by this, rebelled against him, he used his authority to bring me to submission. I struggled fiercely against him, but he crushed me with the strong hand; and I—oh how I learned to hate him—I would have left him, but my father interfered, and spoke to me of all I must lose by so doing.

"Pride came to my aid, and I endured him, that the world might still envy the state that surrounded me. I was then too young to feel how deeply I had been wronged by being irrevocably given to a man for whom I cared nothing, before my heart could choose for itself. The years of discord that rolled by matured me into a creature of reckless will and wild impulse. I feared nothing on earth but the iron firm-

ness of my husband; and that I was resolute to baffle when the hour came in which I could do so with impunity.

"To sting him to the soul—to make him suffer for all the indignities offered me by his uncompromising nature, was the most intense desire of my heart; but the means of doing so came to me only through my own passionate nature; and verily my vengeance recoiled with fearful force upon my own destiny."

She paused as if collecting her thoughts, and Eugenia waited with absorbing interest for what was to follow. The superior caught the expression of her face, and she said,

"I know not that I should reveal to you the sad sequel of my fate; but since I have commenced, I must go on. No human destiny is accomplished unless the heart has felt the influence of love. It came to me as a revelation of the true life—of the only thing on this dull earth worth living for. All that went before seemed tame and spiritless when compared with this thrilling and exquisite emotion. Oh! it was something to be loved as I loved. To know that, weighed in the balance with my affection, no earthly influence of pride or station could for one moment come in comparison with it.

"Yet that man, so honored, so elevated by my preference, proved ungrateful. Gaston was the secretary of my husband; he was a son of the people, but accomplished far beyond the young gallants of fashion that fluttered around me. Gaston was not even handsome; but he had a voice of wonderful power, and a tongue that might have beguiled a soul from Eden itself. I was then in the brightness of my beauty. I knew it; I triumphed in it when I saw the effect of my charms on this man, who had hitherto professed indifference for my sex. I would enslave him—exhibit him in my chains, and then bid him leave my presence forever.

"Alas! I was entangled in my own snare. My heart, which I had deemed inaccessible to love, soon knew no joy in life but the presence of this man. To be near him—to watch the changes in his eloquent face—to listen to the

words that charmed me, as with a spell of subtle power, was all I cared to live for. Gaston knew it; he read it in my voice—in the eyes that could not lift their gaze to his without that expression of tender interest which the heart alone inspires. He was flattered by the preference I took no pains to conceal; he believed that he returned it; but *his* love, when compared with mine, was as the cold gleam of a distant star to the fervid beams of a tropical sun. But he had words at his command—words of such eloquent and passionate power, as made me believe that his heart fully responded to mine.

“Oh yes; I have had one brief gleam of happiness in my life! That single hour in which his passion found words stands out from the surrounding darkness as a point of heavenly radiance. I was happy—supremely, inexpressibly happy in the belief that I was beloved, even as I loved.

“Gaston’s words had been overheard: they were carried to my husband, and he was banished from our dwelling, without a word to me as to the cause of such a proceeding. I was indignant, yet I dared not expostulate, lest I should more heavily feel the power whose iron hand had so long been on my destiny.

“My dislike to my husband now assumed its fiercest phase, and to escape from his authority was the fixed purpose of my heart. In so doing, I did not believe that I wronged him so deeply as I had been wronged myself in being given to him at all. I execrated the ambition which had fettered me to a life of dreary state, destitute of every element of happiness.

“I found means to open a correspondence with my lover. I had unlimited command of money, and I possessed jewels of price. I fled from the home of my husband, carrying enough of these to surround me with the luxury which I felt to be necessary to me. We sought a home in an island in the Mediterranean, where we led a life of delicious freedom and repose. Gaston seemed devoted to me, and I felt not a regret for the splendor I had forsaken. A fair child

was clasped to my bosom, but I loved it less for its own sake than because it formed a new tie between the father and myself; but after a few months of existence, the infant perished, and my heart clung with renewed fervor to its only earthly idol.

"But, alas! Gaston was growing wearied of the monotony of our life. He became cold, almost repulsive in his manner; and when I reproached him with the change, sneers and bitter taunts answered my tears." Soon he tyrannized over me in a more terrible manner than my husband had ever done—for he had never possessed the power to wound me through my affections; while this ungrateful monster trampled remorselessly upon my heart. Still I clung to him with that foolish, desperate devotion which is the last phase of wretchedness in the lot of an unloved woman.

"How I bore with his harshness, I can not now comprehend; but I did. I humbled myself before him. I taught my haughty spirit to bend to his slightest caprice; and, as my reward, received contempt. It was what I merited; but not from him.

"My husband had used every means in his power to discover our retreat, but for two years without success. At length a clew to it was gained, and a cousin of my own, who was a priest, was sent to me to reveal the sentence passed on me. I was to enter a convent as a penitent, and in due time take the vows. I rebelled against this doom; I refused to leave the world, in which I might yet play a conspicuous part.

"My kinsman pleaded, argued, implored; but I was immovable. Then force was used. I was brought hither in a state of mind scarcely removed from madness. Yet I now acknowledge the hand of God in all that happened to me. At first I refused to be comforted, but gradually a peace I could not comprehend stole into my heart. It was like the calming of the ocean after a great storm; and the wrecked traveler was glad to find a haven of rest under that roof, which at first had seemed to her as a prison.

"Oh yes, Eugenia, here have I found resignation, and a truer happiness than the turbulent years of youth ever knew. That you may do likewise, is the prayer of my heart, dear girl; and this recital of my sufferings will not have been made in vain."

She paused, and Eugenia asked' in a tone of interest,

"And Gaston, what became of him?"

A glance of lurid fire flashed from the dark eyes of the superior, and after a pause, she said,

"He fled from the wrath of my husband, which he knew would pursue him to the death; the vessel in which he left the island was wrecked, and Gaston perished. When I learned his fate, I had become a nun, and it affected me but little. My chief regret was, that I had not sooner learned where repose of spirit may alone be found; then this painful episode in my life would not have cast its blight upon my heart. I had masses said for the repose of Gaston's soul; and I believe that, through the intercession of the woman he so deeply wronged, he is now enjoying the unspeakable felicity of Paradise."

Her young listener crossed herself devoutly, and uttered a brief prayer.

By this time evening was closing, and the superior arose and proposed to descend. Eugenia followed her, thinking of the recital she had just heard, and wondering if in truth happiness was alone to be found in conventual seclusion. Her heart began seriously to incline to this belief, for since she had been among them, the nuns who had revealed to her any portion of their inner life made the same assertion, that "the peace which passeth understanding" had been attained by them only as the vowed brides of Christ.

That this was a part of their system, she could not know. That the will of the abbot was a law to the little community, she had no means of discovering; and toward the priest himself she was beginning to cherish a sincere and reverential attachment.

Time passed on, and day by day the young soul became

more deeply inthralled, until the dedication of the spring-time of existence to the worship of God seemed to her the most august, the most to be desired of all earthly destinies. Her mind, through the influence of the teachings addressed to it, attained a strange state of exaltation; and those around her persuaded her that a miracle had been wrought in her behalf, and the Holy Spirit had entered her soul with such power as to draw it irresistibly toward heaven. She spent many hours in prayer and penance, and the fair face became almost spiritual in its expression; while her form assumed an ethereal delicacy of outline, which might have alarmed those who did not know by what means it had been produced. Could all the secrets of that "prison-house" have been laid bare, a subtle chemical agent would have been found in the possession of the superior, which if infused, however slightly, in the drink used by a person of sensitive temperament, would produce the results visible in the young girl.

To Eugenia herself her mind seemed clearer—freer from doubt than ever before; but the two who watched her with never-slumbering interest knew that their will exerted a strange and powerful influence upon her thoughts.

The abbot had studied the wonderful mysteries of human life, and that influence which is now recognized as magnetism he comprehended as far as it has ever been mastered by human skill. In their long interviews, he quietly experimented on the delicately organized being who so deeply interested him, and with a sense of power that made his heart thrill with emotion he found that the electric cord by which her soul was darkly bound responded readily to his will; while her perfect trust in him caused her to feel no shrinking from the influence he wielded over her.

The history of the abbess in its main points was true, but its conclusion was not so; for she had ever rebelled against the fate that gave her to a cloister; and at times indulged in invective against him who had been instrumental in placing her in her present position.

The only person dissatisfied with the fate to which her

daughter was evidently tending was Madame Altenberg. She violently opposed her wish to commence her novitiate, although assured by the abbot that such was evidently the will of Heaven. She comprehended enough of the grasping spirit of the priests to know that the wealth which Eugenia claimed was the chief inducement to those who labored so zealously to bring her into the Church; and she opposed her profession as a nun with all the imprudence of an irritable woman, regardless of consequences.

To convince her that her suspicions were unfounded, the abbot requested Eugenia to convey to her mother the greater portion of the fortune his efforts had succeeded in securing to her; assuring Madame Altenberg, at the same time, that, so soon as her preparations were completed, she was quite at liberty to leave the convent, and seek a home wherever her inclinations might lead her.

Heartily weary of the seclusion of her late existence, pining for change and excitement, she eagerly consented to relinquish her claims on her daughter, provided the money was secured to her. She loved Eugenia, but she had no vocation for a conventual life, and day by day their sympathies seemed to become more widely severed.

Eugenia triumphed in the thought that her mother's accusations of self-interest had been so completely refuted by the relinquishment of so large a portion of her fortune; and she at once assumed the white veil, with the understanding that the term of her novitiate was to be shortened, and her vows be taken on the occasion of the first grand celebration in the Church.

It was strange, but from the time Madame Altenberg commenced her preparations for departure her health began to fail. With the slightest exertion, a sense of suffocation overcame her, and from day to day the attacks increased in frequency and violence. Still she persevered; for she declared that the mountain air affected her heart and lungs so fatally, that she must die if she did not escape from it.

On the last evening of her intended stay, she retired in better spirits than usual, in the prospect of a speedy change. It came, but was greater than she had anticipated ; for it was from time to eternity.

In the morning when Eugenia awoke she found her mother lying cold and motionless beside her, and it was evident that life had departed many hours before. No external evidence betrayed the means by which this opportune death was accomplished ; but the abbot very meaningly congratulated the superior on the accession of wealth which her house would speedily gain through the profession of Mademoiselle Altenberg ; for, in espousing the Church, Eugenia endowed it with the greater portion of her worldly possessions.

Eugenia felt this blow deeply ; but its ultimate effect was to strengthen her determination to take the veil as speedily as possible, and in the duties thus assumed find consolation for her grief.

The remains of her mother were interred with great pomp, and nightly masses were said for the repose of her soul, with extreme unction, by those who had prematurely sent it to its eternal rest.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN the morning, when the different families inhabiting the cave collected in the hall of statues, that Ferron was not among them was scarcely remarked, as he was in the habit of sleeping as late as possible, and rarely joined them before the usual morning service was over. Thus no suspicion of treachery entered the minds of the doomed beings he had betrayed to so ruthless a fate.

This was a day of peculiar interest to several individuals among the refugees. As the cave was regarded as only a temporary place of concealment, constant communication was kept up with their friends without, by whose efforts the means of escape were provided; though new arrivals generally kept a sufficient number in the cave to render a sudden inroad among them a scene of terrific slaughter.

Among those who were so fortunate as to have friends interested in their welfare was a young silk-weaver, who, together with his betrothed bride, had at different times found protection there. Favelle had abjured the Romish faith, had been imprisoned, condemned to the galleys, and while on his way to Montpellier, chained to another Huguenot, by the exertion of great strength he had broken his bonds, released his companion, and together they fled to the mountains. Favelle found an asylum in the cave, while the friend for whom he had done such good service achieved his escape to Geneva, and from there found means to open a way for the young weaver to follow him.

He was betrothed to a girl of his own station, and among those already in hiding he found Leonie, orphaned and rendered homeless by a sudden inroad of the dragoons into her native village. Her father's cottage was destroyed, and in

attempting to resist he was himself slain. Her mother had long been dead, and the young girl escaped almost by a miracle to the protection of a friend, who brought her with him to the cave.

The meeting of the lovers under such circumstances was a matter of interest to their companions in misfortune; and there was a universal feeling of sympathy when it was known that a way was opened for them to escape. A party of four could leave with the promised guide, who was to meet them at the Eagle Pass. It had been settled that M. Lefevre, and the friend who had aided Leonie to reach the hills in safety, should accompany them in their flight.

After the usual evening service was ended, the marriage ceremony between the lovers was to be performed by the pastor; and several children were to be baptized, as the parents knew not when they should again find means to have this sacred duty performed by a minister of their own faith.

As these incidents broke the monotony of their daily life, much interest was manifested in such simple preparations as could be made for them. Quite an illumination was created around the altar, and torches were so distributed throughout the hall as to show its vast proportions and unique architecture.

The fugitives were to depart at twilight, and the evening service was performed at an earlier hour than usual, that time might be afforded after its close to bid adieu to the departing ones. M. Lefevre, pale but quite composed, entered the pulpit, and read the seventy-third Psalm in a most impressive manner. After the hymn, he repeated as his text a few words from what he had just read,

"Nevertheless, I am always with thee."

From them he spoke with an eloquence and fervid power he had never before displayed. The consciousness that this was his last address to those before him seemed to inspire him; and the spirit-stirring appeal he uttered was calculated to nerve his hearers to endure all that man might in-

flict, if the consciousness was with them that for Heaven and truth the conflict was waged.

Every creature in the cave had gathered around the pastor to hear his last instructions; but in so vast a place, so imperfectly lighted, the absence of one man would scarcely be noted; and that of Ferron attracted no attention. The feeling of absolute security that dwelt among them prevented a watch from being kept on any one, beyond the law which forbade them to pass the entrance without the express permission of the sentinel always stationed on duty there. No one issued from it save a few trusty mountaineers acquainted with every pathway for miles around, who kept up outside communication, as was absolutely necessary.

The sermon was ended, and the two to be united arose. They were young and interesting in appearance, and the peculiar circumstances under which they came forward to receive the bridal benediction caused every heart in that assembly to be moved with sympathy for their future welfare. Many a fervent prayer and blessing arose from souls bowed with their own afflictions; and smiles greeted them from wan lips, that of late had rarely been moved by any emotion save that which was sorrowful.

The bride wore her peasant costume, consisting of a dark blue skirt, with a crimson bodice laced across the bust with black, and trimmed with knots of scarlet ribbon. Her black hair was braided in wide plaits, looped fancifully around her head, and fastened with a gold bodkin. She clung timidly to the arm of her lover, who looked proud and happy, notwithstanding the uncertain position in which they stood.

The ceremony was soon performed, and the pair moved slightly aside to permit the children to be offered for baptism. Three were brought forward, and among them the infant son of Laval. His family formed a picturesque group—the towering form of the forester holding the boy in his arms, while his pale wife clung to him on one side, and Lucille stood on the other.

Laval was the last one to present his child, and as the pastor raised his hand and permitted the sacred water of baptism to flow upon the fair brow of the infant, a thrilling cry suddenly broke the impressive sounds of M. Lefevre's voice, and horror-struck faces revealed that they were surrounded by a cordon of soldiers, who had noiselessly approached, and now stood with leveled muskets and glaring eyes, ready to pour destruction in the midst of the helpless and unarmed groups before them.

That cry was the signal ; each dragoon had taken deadly aim at his intended victim, and a simultaneous discharge carried death to nearly every manly heart in that assembly ; while women and children received ghastly wounds, compared with which death would have been mercy. There were flying forms, and wild shrieks, and cries for mercy, that were never hearkened to by the ruthless murderers.

Utter extermination, except to the pastor and Laval, had been their orders, and well did they execute them. So securely had their measures been taken, that not one escaped to the numerous hiding-places afforded by such a place as the cave ; and perhaps it was a mercy that they did not, for there they must have perished by the wasting tortures of famine.

The first discharge had covered Laval with blood from the bridegroom, who fell with his newly-made wife clasped to his breast—happy at least in dying together. The desire to take the forester alive caused so conspicuous a mark to be passed by ; his wife and daughter stood in such positions beside him, that it was impossible to aim accurately at either of them without danger to him ; thus they all escaped the murderous fire, save the infant. A bullet glanced and broke his arm ; the frantic mother snatched him from his father's arms, and fell fainting with terror.

The wretched man stooped to lift them again that he might at least die in the attempt to protect them, when a fierce grasp was laid on his shoulder, and a voice said,

“ You we are commissioned to make prisoner.”

At that instant a cry was heard that vibrated to the inmost soul of the father; and with the fury of a baited tiger he dashed aside the hand that would have held him, and, bounding over the dead and dying, reached his daughter just as a dragoon was laying his rude grasp upon her.

To dash him aside, snatch her to his breast, and fly toward the opening leading to the hills, was the work of a brief moment. Three soldiers started in pursuit; but Laval, burdened as he was, outstripped them all—for he was nerved by desperation; to escape with her, or to destroy her himself, was his stern resolution; though he felt as if the clutch of a fiend was on his heart as the terrible thought passed through it.

The outlet was open, for the sentinel had heard the discharge of fire-arms, and hastened to ascertain its cause. Appalled by the scene that met his view, he fled over the hillside to meet imprisonment from the dragoons who guarded the ravine.

Hotly pursued, the forester rushed through the opening, and gained the edge of the precipice. Two soldiers were on the path in front of him, and he saw there was no escape. He turned his face for one instant toward those who followed him; it was livid, and his hair bristled upon his head like one in mortal fright. His daughter lay helpless upon his breast, and it was evident that terror had rendered her insensible to what was passing.

The grasp of his pursuers was already upon the garments of Laval; their curses were ringing in his ears, when his voice arose with such fearful agony in its tones that even those hardened men recoiled:

"My God! to save her, thou knowest this is all that is left me!" And with a frantic impulse he threw the helpless form over the yawning chasm. One of the dragoons clutched at her dress, and there was an instant of breathless horror; then the garment yielded, and to save himself from losing his footing on the edge of the precipice, the man relaxed his grasp, and the slight form of Lucille went down—down,

while her father stood paralyzed by the deed he had thus been forced to commit, with rigid frame and stony eyes, an image of despair in its most terrible aspect.

He made no attempt to throw himself after her, for Laval considered suicide as the last refuge of a cowardly soul ; and he believed that work yet remained before him in the service of his heavenly Master.

With execrations the dragoons pinioned him and carried him back into the cave, vowing they would punish him for his crime before they turned him over to the strong arm of ecclesiastical authority to be dealt with according to his heretical contumacy. As his captors rudely dragged him along, at every step the dead and dying met his view ; but, stunned and bewildered by the awful scene he had just passed through, he was unmoved by the groans and faint wails of anguish that arose on every side.

Unarmed, and believing themselves secure, the Huguenots had been massacred without even a chance of resistance ; and in obedience to the sanguinary orders of the priest, nearly all had fallen victims. As the party approached the altar, Laval saw M. Lefevre pinioned, and seated beneath the pulpit in which he had recently officiated ; and close beside his feet lay the pallid form of his own wife, holding her stunned and bleeding child to her bosom with that frantic clasp which even insensibility could not relax. The old man had covered his eyes to shut out the dreadful scene before him ; and he prayed in broken tones, endeavoring thus to shut out the harrowing thoughts that crowded in his mind, while in anguish of spirit he asked for submission to the will of God. One of the soldiers rudely seized his arm, and tearing his hands from his face, said,

"You have escaped from us once, old fellow ; but it's the last chance you'll have to play your tricks on me. We'll try our hand on you again, and on this fellow here too, before we hand you over to the priests to be roasted, as all heretics deserve. Look around you, and see what your fellow-unbelievers have come to."

"Friend," replied M. Lefevre, mildly, "they are happier than you; for they have entered into the joys of their Father's kingdom, and you have yet to answer for the crime that sent them there by violence. Laval, my good friend, we have doubtless been singled out to meet a sterner fate. I feel that I can endure what God may send; how is it with you, my poor fellow?"

"If I could battle it out with them as man to man," said the forester, in a hollow tone, "I could endure; but these bonds—this tortured heart, are hard to bear."

His eyes fell on his wife and son, and dilated with new horror as he beheld evidences that they yet lived. In a despairing tone he exclaimed,

"They move—they breathe; when I trusted they had passed into a better land."

At this moment his wife raised herself up with an expression of intense fear upon her pallid face. The child, roused by the movement, uttered a feeble cry, and the dragoon brutally said,

"Here are two of these cursed heretics still alive. I'll make short work with them."

He unsheathed his dagger, and Laval saw the glittering blade raised to strike almost with an emotion of joy; better death for his hapless wife, than such a life as must now remain to her. Annette uttered a wild cry, and called on her husband for help. His name stayed the man's hand in the act of striking, and he laughed savagely as he asked,

"Is this your wife and child?"

Laval made no reply; but Annette said,

"Yes—yes, we are. Murder us not in his sight."

"Not just yet," replied the dragoon, coolly. "But I do not believe you will consider it a particular grace that I do not kill you at once."

"Oh, Annette! why did you not die with courage?" asked Laval, despairingly. "My own tortures are as nothing; but yours—the lad's, how can I bear them and live?"

The brutal soldier seized the child, whose broken arm

hung helpless by his side, and swung him aloft ; fully restored to sensibility by the pain, he cried out, and the man said,

"Here's music for you! Hear how it rings through these old walls."

The mother clung to his knees, and implored mercy, but he spurned her fiercely, and said,

"Get out of my way, woman! This young spawn of heresy you shall never again lay your hands on : he belongs to me, to do as I please with."

By this time the bloody work was completed by dispatching the wounded, and the dragoons began to gather around the actors in this scene. Jeers, taunts, and insults were offered to the helpless victims left at their mercy. Lefevre attempted to remonstrate, but his interference was resented so fiercely that the result to him might have been fatal, had not two soldiers sent by Captain Delmont opportunely arrived, with an order from him for the delivery of M. Lefevre, that he might be conducted as a prisoner to Nismes.

The dragoons in the cave formed a portion of his own troop, and they dared not disobey the command ; so, after enduring a few more indignities, the captured pastor was permitted to leave the cave under the escort of the two sent on this timely errand ; but the wretched Laval remained at the mercy of the soldiers. A brief and affecting adieu passed between the two, and then M. Lefevre was hurried away.

A short consultation took place between the leaders, and they determined to remove their three captives to the interior hall discovered by Ferron, there to torture them at their leisure. The dead bodies of the slain were left as they had fallen ; but the beautiful altar was destroyed, amidst blasphemies and curses that were terrible to hear. It was blown into fragments by gunpowder ; one of the pieces struck Madame Laval upon the forehead, and injured her severely ; but the accident only elicited brutal jests from the cruel beings around her, and her mental anguish was too great to permit her to feel severely the physical suffering she endured.

This accomplished, the prisoners were dragged through

the rough avenue, the poor child crying with pain at every step, while his mother, held in the strong grasp of one of her persecutors, was not permitted to approach him. At length they reached the hall, and Laval was fastened with additional cords to one of the stone figures in front of the throne, while his wife was seated in the outspread arms of another, and tied in such a manner as effectually to prevent her escape. The wounded child was then placed upon a projection on the throne, just in front of the wretched parents, and left there to perish, in their sight, of pain and exhaustion. His piteous wailings only elicited jests and scoffs from the wretches around; and when they sunk into a feeble moan of suffering, the points of their spears were used to lacerate his tender flesh, and arouse him to a new sense of pain. In vain did the frantic mother entreat that they would kill him; in vain struggle to reach him, that she might soothe his anguish.

"Wait till the priest comes," said one of the men. "He will tell you how you can keep the lad alive."

At these words Madame Laval turned her eyes upon the face of her husband. He could not behold this scene without struggling with maniac strength to free himself from his bonds; but his captors only jeered at the impotency of his efforts. They had stretched his arms out and bound them to the wings of the stone image, and his feet were not permitted to reach the floor, thus causing the whole weight of his body to fall upon the cords that bound him, inflicting the most exquisite physical torture. His torn and blood-stained garments; the stony horror which had never left his face since he saw the form of his daughter sink into that terrible abyss, all combined to render him an object of fearful and heroic suffering; for no insult had been able to wring from his pallid lips an expression of fear or entreaty. At the allusion to the priest, he turned his deep gaze upon his wife, and understood the mute appeal she made. He spoke in a hollow and broken voice,

"Annette, you would save the boy at the price of your

own soul, which, ere long, will be required at your hands. The lad must perish; but Christ has said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me,' and He will do better for him than those into whose hands he must fall if he continues on earth. Let us die as we have lived, in the firm belief that God is with us, in spite of the sufferings we bear for his sake."

Annette closed her eyes, and her trembling lips prayed for strength to obey; for, firm as her faith was, she had but a weak woman's heart, and she believed that the mercy of the divine Being would pardon a recantation wrung from them under such terrible circumstances.

Suddenly the sound of a distant chant came breathing faintly into the hall. It momentarily increased in volume, and gradually swelled through the arched roof, a joyful pean over the ruthless sacrifice which had so lately been consummated. A train of priests, bearing consecrated candles, with lighted censers swung before them, came winding into the saloon, chanting a *Te Deum* over the destruction of the heretics.

They came forward slowly, and arranged themselves in front of the throne. At a sign from one of them, the child was removed, and placed almost within reach of his mother, where her eyes could behold his sinking features, over which the pale violet tinge of approaching death was already spreading. His garments had been nearly torn from his body, and on his delicate flesh the cruel punctures made by the lances were traced in crimson lines—a sight to make angels weep, but which only drew approving looks from the fanatical crowd that gathered around the altar on which they were about to offer the oblation of worship to a Being of whom it is expressly said "that his heart is filled with compassion toward the creatures He has made."

The lights were arranged and mass performed, the blood-stained actors in the late scene joining in it as devoutly as if deeds of Christian benevolence had alone occupied their time. A plenary absolution for all their sins was then granted them, in consideration of the good service they had just rendered the Church, and the religious pageant was ended.

Then the officiating priest turned to the prisoners. He was a man of stern and cold aspect, with that deep, rayless black eye which is ever cruel. There was nothing to hope from the relentings of his heart, and Madame Laval closed her eyes in despair as he gazed down on her and asked,

"Daughter, has not the good God convinced you that his wrath follows heretical unbelievers as a consuming fire? Behold, to what a pass he has brought you, as a punishment for your rebellion against his holy Church."

Her hands were at liberty, and she feebly motioned him away, but made no reply. He pointed to her child, and continued,

"Behold the argument addressed to you through the tenderest sympathies of your nature. Will you be guilty of the murder of your own offspring, when submission to the law and the Church will enable you to save him alive? Harden not your heart, daughter, but obey the promptings of nature, for I assure you they are of God, and hallowed in his sight."

The unhappy mother raised her head and cast a despairing look upon her husband. Calm, rigid, and mournful was the answering expression it met, and she felt that the last fatal stab would be given him if she faltered now. She sunk back murmuring,

"Leave me; let me die; it is now my only wish."

At that instant, as if to strengthen the appeal of the priest, a feeble cry came from the lips of the infant; the mother stretched her arms imploringly toward him, and said,

"Give him to me; let him die upon my breast. Oh! that is not much to grant to one in such extremity as mine."

"Purchase the right and it is yours," and he held a crucifix before her. "Make the sign of the cross; press this holy image to your lips, and your child shall be restored to you."

"And my husband?" she feebly asked.

"He must answer for himself, as you for yourself."

"Then we must both perish, for he will never recant ;" and from that moment she had firmness to close her lips, and refuse to reply to the entreaties, threats, and commands that alternately assailed her. She lay with her eyes fixed immovably upon her dying child, endeavoring to pray, but with a heart so torn with anguish as to render her scarcely conscious of what she asked. Weakened by previous illness, she was rapidly sinking into the embrace of death herself, and a few more hours would probably release her from the power of her tormentors.

With savage joy Laval saw this result approaching ; and it gave him strength to defy the priest when he at length turned to him and uttered an anathema against all who rebelled against the authority of the holy apostolic Church, and used their influence to mislead others. At length, goaded to fury by the fearless replies he received, the priest said,

"You shall be forced to recant by some means ; I care not what they may be, provided the recantation is gained."

"My tongue shall be torn from my mouth, and my right hand consumed in a slow fire, before I will suffer either to wrong my heart so basely," was the firm response. "Torture me, kill me, as you have the will to do ; but my immortal spirit is beyond your power ; and that shall enter into the presence of its Maker untarnished by this base apostasy."

The priest eyed him coldly. He said,

"Speak not with such certainty. Wait—see what a few more hours may produce."

"It matters not ; so long as sense and judgment remain with me, I will be true to my faith. God will not hardly judge the acts of a madman, especially if that madness is the result of cruelties sanctioned by those who claim to be the ministers of his grace and mercy upon earth. To him I leave my cause ; it could not be in better hands."

Rendered furious by his bold words, the priest turned away, uttering the anathema of the Church against all con-

tumacious and unbelieving persons. He spoke to Pierre, the leader of the dragoons, and said,

"I leave you to deal with him as you choose. Gain the recantation at all hazards: he will subsequently retract it; and that will afford a pretext for exemplary punishment."

In obedience to a movement from him, the procession again formed; a requiem for the dead was chanted in slow and solemn measure as they wound slowly through the passage; now dying nearly away; then rising again in choral majesty, as if a new echo had seized and swelled each tone as it passed into a wild wail of sorrow that moaned through the vast dome in such melancholy cadences as might have moved the most insensible spirit. Even the rude soldiers listened awe-struck, until the last echo died away. Then they aroused themselves to the performance of the cruel duty delegated to them.

Wine and provisions had been brought in abundance for the refreshment of the dragoons; and in the intervals between the torments inflicted on their victims, they indulged in drinking, until the cave presented a scene of wild riot and drunken blasphemy that no words have power to delineate, even if the pen of the writer did not recoil from such an attempt.

The flesh of Laval was lacerated by thrusting splinters of burning wood into it. His beard was plucked out in small portions at a time; and finally the rude figure to which he was bound was torn from its place, and rested against another in such a position as to enable them to insert a tube in his mouth, into which they poured wine until his eyes seemed bursting from their sockets, and the purple hue of his features gave evidence that he had reached a state of stupid intoxication.

In this condition, a cross was brought and laid upon his breast; his right hand was unbound, and a pen placed in it. A paper, containing a full recantation of his heretical errors, and a petition to be received again into the bosom of the Church, was then brought, and his hand guided until it was

made to sign it. Thus obtained, the recantation was carefully preserved, to be used against him should he dare to repudiate the deed when his senses were restored.

By this time, Madame Laval had sunk into an apparent state of insensibility, from which they deemed it best to arouse her. Leaving her husband to sleep off the fumes of the wine with which they had drenched him, they surrounded the dying mother and child, and kept up a continued uproar worthy of pandemonium itself; occasionally pausing to shout into the dulled ears of the expiring woman the inquiry as to whether she would follow the example of her husband, and save her soul by a repudiation of all her heretical errors.

But poor Madame Laval could no longer understand them; the faint and struggling breath that issued from her lips was the only evidence that life yet lingered in her frame, and the infant was already cold in death. Receiving no response, the sergeant, as a last atrocity, seized the marble form of the boy, and dashing it upon his mother's breast, exclaimed,

"There wretches! go and burn together. You prayed for him, and he is yours now."

The action seemed to arouse some gleam of consciousness in the dying mother, for she partially unclosed her dimming eyes, and made an effort to clasp the form thus rudely thrust against her; but strength and life alike failed. The half-raised hand dropped nerveless by her side, and the mother and child were alike insensible to farther wrong or insult.

Many hours had been consumed in these orgies, and, wearied even with their own brutalities, the dragoons at length slept heavily. Silence reigned where so lately resounded tumult and blasphemy; gradually the fumes of the wine which Laval had been forced to swallow were dissipated, and his mind acted clearly again. Why his senses had been thus obscured, he too well understood; for this was but one of the many cruel stratagems resorted to by

the Papists to force a recantation of which the most unjustifiable use was afterward made.

Bound, ruined, and helpless, nothing now remained to the wretched man but his trust in God ; and he prayed to Him with fervent spirit to sustain his courage, and keep his heart firm through every temptation. Thinking that the sight of his dead wife and son would torture him, the soldiers had placed them in such a position that, as soon as he recovered his senses, he must observe them. He only returned thanks for their deliverance from the cruel power of his enemies ; but a pang of bitter anguish rent his heart when he thought of that young being hurled to destruction by his own hand. In imagination, he followed her down—down that terrific plunge to the final point of rest, and his strong form thrilled with agony.

The physical and mental tortures he had endured for so many hours at length began to affect his mind fearfully. Shapes of horror flitted before him ; then a sea of blood seemed to roll over them and blot them all out ; from this a white terror-stricken face gleamed, now hidden by the red waves, and anon visible at some other point, yet always ghastly and pallid, amidst the ensanguined flood in which it seemed to surge.

Conscious that this was but a vision created by the excited condition of his nerves, Laval exercised all his moral force to regain the just balance of his thoughts ; and for a few moments a clear perception of the realities around him was recalled ; but these were not of a nature to calm or console his disordered faculties, and again that train of visionary horrors would sweep before him.

His hands had again been bound, and he made Herculean efforts to release them, but in vain. His captors were too well aware of his strength and daring to permit a chance of escape to a prisoner they had been assured was of such importance to the priests.

Slowly the dragoons slept off the effects of their debauch, and one by one aroused themselves to a comprehension of

the scene in which they found themselves. Loud cries and shrieks, as from one suffering from a paroxysm of insanity, echoed through the dismal cave, now only lighted by a few dying torches. They gathered around the wretched prisoner, whose glaring eyes, foaming lips, and maniac cries revealed the result of the mental anguish he had so long endured.

The hair, which at sunset had been black as the wing of the raven, was now as white as snow; and the writhing lips uttered such moans of anguish as might have touched a heart of steel. The comment made by one of the soldiers was,

"See how God deals with these heretics. He takes every thing from them, even to their senses; and yet they will persist in the wrong."

Such was the fanatical spirit infused into their ignorant minds by those who assumed the duty of leading them in the path to heaven.

Since Laval was in no condition to be farther tormented, and they had, at any rate, obtained the recantation the priest desired, the sergeant made preparations to leave the cave. The bodies of the mother and child were irreverently thrown into a convenient nook, where they were screened from observation; the half paralyzed form of the madman was released from the painful position in which it had so long lain; but still sufficiently bound to preclude any chance of escape.

A small detachment was sent with Laval through the avenue leading into the vaults; this had been opened and cleared out by the soldiers as they passed through it on their way to the cave, and a rude bridge was thrown across the dividing stream. On the same day, by the orders of the superior, the passage was closed at both extremities, that ingress should no longer be afforded into the secret prison-house over which she presided.

The remainder of the party returned through the outer caverns, and they stopped to mutilate and destroy whatever was found most beautiful in their adornment. The bodies

of the slain remained as they had fallen ; no attempt was made to bury them ; but no sooner had the departure of the dragoons become known, than stealthy steps approached ; mangled forms were sought for with tender care, and the rites of sepulture rendered with many bitter tears. Graves were dug in the silence of night within the cave itself, and beings once fondly cherished were consigned to them with no ritual save the broken prayer and bursting sob from the wrung heart of friend or relative, as the earth was placed upon the shroudless breast.

The lofty dome, so lately echoing with the songs of praise, now arose as a vast sepulchral monument above those who had met so fearful a fate ; and no voice of faithful pastor was found to chant *Requiescat in pace*.

Notwithstanding the state to which the sufferings of Laval had reduced him, he was conveyed to the ceps—cells so contrived that free movement in them was impossible. In these terrible places, rest and motion were alike forbidden to their occupants, and no torture could have been invented more protracted or difficult to bear. Food barely sufficient to sustain life was furnished to him ; and day after day he was visited by the priests with questions and instructions to which he could now neither reply nor understand.

At length, fearing their victim would escape them, and resolute to make such an example of the forester as must strike terror into the hearts of the Huguenotes, D'Aguesseau caused him to be removed to a more comfortable place of confinement, and to receive such medical attendance as he needed. Under this treatment, the wild paroxysms of insanity subsided into a gloomy and settled aberration of intellect ; but never for one moment did his unbalanced mind cease to cling to his faith. That was indeed to him the "rock of ages," and every influence brought to bear against it proved utterly powerless.

His memory remained clear ; and it supplied him with an infinite number of texts from the Bible, which had been his life-long study, with which to refute the arguments of

his priestly persecutors. He utterly rejected the validity of the recantation so shamefully obtained, and refused to acknowledge that for one moment in his life he had ever acknowledged the infallibility of the Romish Church.

Finding him utterly intractable, Laval was finally thrown into a dungeon, there to await his mockery of a trial; and the dungeons of Nismes were so loathsome, that the historians of the times speak of them as among the worst to be found in France.

Awaiting their trial in the same prison, though in a cell a few degrees better than the one given the forester, were several Huguenot gentlemen; among whom was Claude Chastain, now an avowed Protestant; and among his friends it was apprehended that it would be worse with him on account of his lapse from Catholicism.

CHAPTER XVII.

M. LEFEVRE was not found among these prisoners; and a few hours after his departure from the cavern a strange scene occurred in which he was one of the principal actors.

It was quite dark when the dragoons delivered him to Captain Delmont; he received him with the courtesy due to his former station, and ordered one of his troop to dismount and give the prisoner his horse. Almost in silence they proceeded to Nismes, and stopped at the intendant's residence.

M. Lefevre was brought into the presence of D'Aguesseau; who in coarse and brutal language informed him that, at the earnest request of the Abbot of the Dominicans, and of that faithful son of Mother Church, the Sieur de Montour, he was to be saved from a trial which must inevitably end in his condemnation, and placed in the custody of the latter gentleman.

In vain did the prisoner protest against an arrangement that would throw him into the power of his two worst enemies. His remonstrances were treated with contempt; and in half an hour he again set out, under the escort of four dragoons, to the Chateau de Montour. Delmont still accompanied him, and when they reached the open country he commanded the men to fall back beyond hearing. He then abruptly began:

"M. Lefevre, I trust you are aware that my position compels me to act this part toward you?"

"I comprehend your situation, Captain Delmont," replied M. Lefevre, "and I assure you that I am grateful for the courtesy you have extended to me. Indeed, I feel that I should rather rejoice that you are placed in such a position

as enabled you to rescue me from the fury of those wretched murderers this evening."

The young man drew nearer to him, and lowered the tone of his voice :

"It is in your power, M. Lefevre, to enlist me so strongly in your interests, that I will use influence of some weight to rescue you and yours from the evil destiny that of late has overtaken you."

"I thank you, my young friend ; but I believe I do not quite understand you."

"I will speak plainly then, Monsieur. I will frankly tell you that, as the husband of your daughter, I will claim the right to protect the father of my wife from farther persecution on account of his religious belief."

The prisoner warmly grasped his hand :

"Delmont, you are an honest man, and a true one, I believe. I thank you with all my heart for your willingness to aid me in this extremity. But I must speak the truth to you at once ; my daughter can never become your wife."

"That is all Irene herself deigns to say when I press my suit," replied Delmont, impatiently. "What barrier prevents it ? Is she not free to receive my offered hand ?"

"You yourself are scarcely free to offer it to a Huguenot bride," replied M. Lefevre, evasively. "Better is it to seek one of your own belief ; for *my* daughter will never relinquish the truths impressed on her mind from childhood."

"I do not ask her to do so ; her religion may be a matter between herself and her Creator. I shall not interfere with it, I assure you : I pledge myself to hold it sacred."

"But neither the law nor the Church to which you belong will permit that degree of freedom to you. Both alike forbid such a union, and both judgment and feeling are opposed to it. In the impulse of passion, you would wed my child ; but soon difference of opinion on this vital point would create dissensions, which the priests would take care to imbitter ; until domestic happiness must be destroy-

ed. Take the advice of a man who has witnessed these things, and seek one of your own faith with whom to share your prosperity."

"I love but one, and she shall be my bride, or I will have none," replied Delmont, passionately. "You will think better of this, M. Lefevre. "I will not relinquish hope."

"It were best to do so, I assure you," said the father, in a tone of such sincere conviction as fell heavily upon the heart of the lover; and he sunk into a gloomy silence, in which they pursued the remainder of their way.

Twenty-eight years had passed away since M. Lefevre fled with his bride over the road he was now traversing; and many painful thoughts, mingled with some that were sweet, swept through his mind. In all that time, the friend he had once loved, the brother he had left alone, and himself had never stood face to face. Carefully had each shunned the other. Lefevre, because he felt the uselessness of making overtures of reconciliation; De Montour, because he cherished a deep feeling of resentment and outraged pride at the result of his efforts to proselyte his friend.

Now, after years of estrangement, they were to meet—the injurer in the power of the injured; and what the result would be, God alone could foresee.

The party stopped in front of the heavy mansion, and after bidding him a friendly adieu, Delmont delivered M. Lefevre over to two servitors who came forward to receive him. At the last moment, he wrung his hand and whispered,

"Should matters be arranged—should Irene consent to become mine, I will rescue you from your prison."

M. Lefevre returned the pressure, but made no audible response; he turned away, and mechanically followed the guidance of the two men who walked on either side. He passed through those portions of the chateau that had been familiar to him in other days, and entered the mouldering and dilapidated rooms, which had long been abandoned to the possession of the bats. From one of these, a massive

door opened on a flight of steps, winding down toward the subterranean apartments of the castle.

These had not been used for many years ; but, by the order of the *Sieur de Montour*, one of the dreary cells had been cleaned, and prepared for the reception of his brother-in-law. It was a room about ten feet square, fitted up like the cell of an ascetic ; there was no aperture for air or light, except a narrow grating at the very edge of the ceiling, which opened on a level with the yard without. A feeling of chilling dampness struck through the frame on entering this gloomy place, and the prisoner could not refrain from saying,

"And is this the best apartment the *Sieur de Montour* can afford the husband of his sister in his extensive habitation ?"

"This room was chosen by my lord himself," said one of the attendants, respectfully. "He bade me say that he would visit you himself within the hour."

An iron lamp was placed on a table, and the two men left the cell and locked the door behind them. *M. Lefevre* surveyed the narrow space around ; the floor and walls were of stone ; and the latter were partially covered with rude engravings of the martyrdom of the Saints. Opposite the rough bed, which was placed in one corner, was a crucifix, on which was a figure of the dead Christ, with so little that was spiritual in his expression that he might have been mistaken for one of the thieves that perished by his side.

Several books containing evidences of the antiquity of the Romish Church were placed conspicuously upon the table. After looking into them, *M. Lefevre* sat down, and leaning his head upon his hands, surrendered his mind to gloomy and painful thought. He knew that the same roof sheltered himself and his daughter, yet he scarcely indulged the hope that they would be permitted to meet, or even that *Irene* would be apprized of the fact that her father was so near her.

The intolerant and overbearing character the *Sieur de Montour* had acquired as he advanced in years was well

known to M. Lefevre, and he felt that it would have been a greater mercy to fall into the power of the law, unjust as it was to those of his faith, than to be thus immured under the guardianship of one who hated him with the cherished rancor of years.

By the former, he at least would be tried before men ; and even if condemned, he could bear witness to the principles that actuated his life, and furnish an example of firmness to those Huguenots who, for safety, went over by thousands to the Papists ; converted by such tender mercies as we have described. Death he could have met bravely ; but to be immured in this dreary place, perhaps for the remainder of his existence, was a thought that well might make him shrink.

His reflections were interrupted by the unclosing of the door, and the *Sieur de Montour* stood before him, wearing an expression of severe scrutiny, which revealed that tender or gentle memories of the past found no place in his heart.

For many moments those two men, who had last parted in the flush of early manhood, stood and gazed upon each other, mutely marking the changes which nearly thirty years had produced. Lefevre saw that the haughty and striking face, which in youth had been distinguished for its aristocratic beauty, had hardened into lines of iron seeming ; and the eyes, once full of life and fire, now looked from beneath their lowering brows with cold, mistrustful gleam. There was little to attract, and much to repel, in the appearance of the *Sieur de Montour* ; and Lefevre wondered if this could indeed be the being he had once regarded with the affection of a brother.

On the other hand, *De Montour* could scarcely persuade himself that the gray-haired, prematurely aged man before him was the friend of his early days ; though the expression which had characterized his youthful face still remained much the same ; the only difference being that time and suffering had given it more elevation—something more spiritual than in his earlier years. The *Sieur de Montour* was the first to speak. With strong emphasis, he said,

"Deceiver—traitor! we have met at last, and as it is fitting we should meet. Behold, the words of holy Writ have come to pass, 'I will smite his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him.'"

M. Lefevre listened calmly to this address. He replied, with something of sorrow in his tone,

"And after all these years of separation, suffering, and death, you meet me with a taunt like this. Reginald de Montour, has time taught you no toleration? Have the teachings of God spoken to your heart of hatred and bitterness alone? I assure you that in mine the spirit of loving-kindness toward you has always dwelt, in spite of our estrangement."

"The wrong-doer may well speak thus to him he has injured in the most vital point. Had we changed places, perhaps your experience would have been different. You won from my side the bright being that might have made me a less stern man; and oh! bitter thought, that for years has gnawed at my heart as a consuming fire! You—you have been the means of giving her over to everlasting suffering. Your fatal love destroyed her forever; for a few fleeting years of earthly felicity, she bartered her immortal soul."

Lefevre was deeply shocked and wounded at these words. He asked:

"Do you really believe this?"

"I do, with all my soul—with all my heart; with the full conviction of my judgment. There is but *one* Church, and beyond that there is *no* salvation."

M. Lefevre regarded him compassionately. He gravely said,

"Believing this, I do not wonder that you cherish a mortal hatred to me. But I must assure you that if, in the sight of a just and kind God, any human being is justified, it is she of whom you spoke. Never did a purer being live; and if I believed her condemned for a mere difference of opinion, I would abjure all faith—all hope, and perish in the darkness of atheism."

"Since you are now but one remove from it, you may as well go the whole way," replied M. de Montour, with a cold sneer. "The one has as good a chance to enter the kingdom of Heaven as the other."

M. Lefevre gazed on him in silent surprise. At length he said,

"I would learn something of my daughter; and also, what is your purpose in bringing me hither?"

"As it regards the latter, it seems sufficiently plain I will be your jailer, and see what time and perseverance can do toward bringing you over to the right. Penance and mortification in the silence of this cell will be better than figuring in an *auto da fe* in Nîmes. I wished to save you that disgrace, though I love you not. Your daughter I, in my turn, will make the means of returning to you the wrong of which you were guilty toward me. I will make her a Catholic; marry her to one who will keep her in the right path; and then, in some degree, you will comprehend what I have endured at your hands."

"There, I fear not all your power. Irene has been taught the truth, and from it she will never swerve. The sacred memory of her mother will preserve her faith pure from all the arts that can be practiced against her."

"Time will prove all things," responded the uncle, drily. "Irene is but mortal; and if reasoning does not convince her, penance or the promise of temporal rewards may. Women are made to yield, as was unhappily proved in the case of her unfortunate mother."

"And is it really your intention to keep my child and myself beneath the same roof, and not permit us to meet?"

"To what purpose? That you may have an opportunity to strengthen her in her own will? No—my niece shall not be informed of your presence here. Make up your mind to what is inevitable; this is your home, until the submission of Irene to my will produces an alleviation to your imprisonment. You owe me thanks that things are not even worse with you."

Lefevre repressed the bitter emotions that arose within him. He earnestly said,

"Far better had it been for me to die, bearing witness to the truths I believe, than to perish by the living death to which you have consigned me. I have passed my life in the free air of heaven, and confinement in this narrow space will crush both mind and body. Is there no feeling in your heart, De Montour, that prompts it to relent from this cruelty?"

"Is not this happiness compared with that lake of fire and brimstone across which Dives' eyes were cast in despair; and into which flesh of my flesh now expiates the sin of having loved you?"

There was a tone of dreary conviction in the tones of his voice, that caused his listener to tremble—not with superstitious terror, however, for that his well-poised mind had never known; but with a feeling of tender reverence for the sacred dead, which rendered such an assertion inexpressibly shocking to him. He replied in a broken tone,

"May the God whose mercy you have outraged forgive you, De Montour."

He bowed his head upon his hands, and his uncompromising brother-in-law left the cell.

From this night De Montour visited him no more. The chaplain daily came to dispute with him on theological points, and as this broke the monotony of his confinement, M. Lefevre welcomed his appearance. From him he gradually learned something of his daughter. Irene had been ill almost unto death; nay, she still lay very low, though the physician apprehended no fatal termination to her malady.

Mademoiselle Lefevre had been discovered holding communication with some person beyond the walls of the chateau, and the severity of the penances inflicted on her at the command of her uncle had seriously affected her health. While suffering from this cause, she accidentally learned that Claude Chastain had been imprisoned, and such proof existed against him of having gone over to the Huguenots,

that he at once acknowledged the charge. It was believed that the result of his trial before the ecclesiastical power would be condemnation to death, or the galleys. This news produced the most disastrous effect upon Irene. Violent fever attacked her, in which she became delirious, and raved of Chastain in the most singular manner. That she was deeply attached to him, was revealed by her wild language; but that knowledge only rendered her uncle the more determined to complete the union he so earnestly desired between Captain Delmont and his niece.

These facts M. Lefevre elicited by degrees; for that priest was not a prudent man, and he was very fond of talking. Besides, he became interested in the prisoner; and he was far less strict in his views than his employer. It was chiefly to her uncle that Irene owed the severity of the penances she had undergone, and not to the well-fed father, who really thought it signified very little what one believed, provided the good things of this life were secured by conformity to the ruling opinions of the times. The abbé had adopted the priestly calling as the easiest of all lives, and he contrived to live as an epicurean amid the ascetic privations often practiced by his host and his daughter. His sufficient excuse was, that his health required generous diet; and he had a dispensation from his superior.

The Abbot of the Dominicans also visited him, for the purpose of arguing in favor of his own Church, and denouncing the heretical opinions of the Huguenots. Finding M. Lefevre resolved to hold no argument with him on a subject in which each one was equally well versed, and each one wedded to his own belief, the monk uttered the severest maledictions against his obstinacy, and finally left him to seek M. de Montour. Their conference was long, and the concluding remark of the abbot was ominous of the future fate of the prisoner. He said,

"Should Lefevre prove utterly contumacious, it will be easy to transfer him to the galleys without the form of a trial. This can be done so secretly that no one interested

in his fate will know where to inquire for him ; through my influence with the intendant, I can procure the necessary order at any time."

"I will wait yet a little while," replied De Montour, gloomily, "and see what can be done with Irene. We may be able to win her over through her love for her father ; and I am so anxious to save the immortal soul of the poor child, that, to succeed in bringing her over to the truth, I would even sacrifice my cherished hope of vengeance against Lefevre."

The lip of the listener curled, but he turned his face away to conceal its expression from his companion. He spoke in a carefully modulated voice,

"Right, my son. If the sheep that strayed from the fold was worth reclaiming by the Good Shepherd, surely the soul that has never been permitted to behold the true light of faith should be brought to see and comprehend its saving power. Gently, if it may be thus dealt with ; with power and unction, if it prove rebellious."

"Those are my own views precisely, and I have carried them out toward my niece. She unfortunately became ill, or I think before this time my measures must have brought her to obedience."

"Is there really any chance that young Delmont will succeed in his suit to her ? I believe your heart is set on that union."

"Yes ; and it shall take place yet. Since I ascertained, from her delirious ravings, that some entanglement exists between Claude Chastain and herself, I am only more firmly resolved that her marriage with a staunch Catholic shall preclude all chance of her falling under the influence of a miserable renegade to the faith in which he was reared."

"Make yourself easy on that score," said the priest, coolly. "Chastain will never issue from his prison, save to receive his trial and condemnation. His case is an aggravated one, and for such the Church has but one punishment—death."

"That is well ; let him die, and receive the reward due

to his abandonment of that august and holy Mother, who watches with such tender care over her true children; but metes out fit retribution to those who audaciously defy her righteous rule. When does his trial come on?"

"Before many weeks. I received only yesterday a communication from Père la Chaise, in which he assures me that the king is nearly brought to the point we have so long desired; even the revocation of the Edict of Henry IV., which still protects the Huguenots in some degree; though in this province we have contrived to render its provisions nearly nugatory. When the Edict of Nantes is actually annulled, we will celebrate it in Nismes by an oblation of victims after the manner of the olden times, when the fumes from the blood of the sacrifice ascended to heaven, and found acceptance in the sight of the Almighty."

"A fitting doom for those who reject the Church, founded by Him who bore the punishment of death for such as believe on Him, and his only manifestation on earth, the holy, true, and sacred mother of religious faith—the august See of Rome."

The abbot crossed himself, though he was by no means so fanatical in his belief as his companion, and soon afterward took his leave.

The heart of M. Lefevre yearned to behold his daughter once more, and he used all his address to induce the chaplain to aid him in so doing. He pledged his word to make no effort to escape, and after many entreaties the priest at last consented to take him at the hour of midnight to the door of Irene's chamber, and permit him to enter and gaze a few moments upon her as she slept. On no account was he to make any effort to arouse or speak to her, as that would betray to her that her father was near her—a fact which her uncle had given strict orders should be kept from her knowledge.

After failing to keep his appointment several nights, the chaplain at length came, and signified that all was ready for their enterprise. He said,

"You must be very cautious; for Mademoiselle Bertha sleeps in the apartment adjoining that of her cousin, and at the slightest noise she will come into the sick-room. It is no longer necessary to watch with your daughter, though some one must be within call, and that office Mademoiselle Bertha has taken on herself. It is very kind of her too, I must say."

The priest went in front and carried the light, while M. Lefevre followed with a beating heart to gaze by stealth in the silence of night upon the beloved features of his suffering child. And this violence to nature was done by those who believed they were obeying the will of God, and doing service well pleasing in His sight, by severing the tenderest ties of affection.

They paused a few moments at the door of Irene's chamber, to ascertain that all was still within. With trembling hands M. Lefevre ventured slightly to unclosethe door and look in.

The room was spacious, and handsomely furnished; for Irene, since her illness, had been removed from the dreary tower she first occupied to an apartment adjoining that of her cousin. A lamp burned behind a small screen, which broke its rays from the couch, and by its light the father found his way to the bedside of his child.

Irene lay white and motionless, under the influence of a strong anodyne; and M. Lefevre saw in the wasted features and thin hands how much she had suffered. Even in the heavy sleep that now bound her senses, an expression of pain was on the still face; showing that the last thought which stamped itself upon her slumbering soul was not one of hope or happiness.

Ah! how fondly the father's heart yearned over her! How deep would have been his joy to be able to clasp her to his breast, and assure her of his presence; but this, alas! he dared not do. One hand lay outside the coverlet, and he ventured cautiously to take it into his own. Even his touch seemed to possess some magnetic power to recall him to her

sleeping senses; for her lips unclosed, and she murmured broken sentences in which his name occurred. He bent down his head to listen, and, after a few unconnected mutterings, she more distinctly said,

"Father—Cland—lost, lost—all lost!" and a convulsive sob broke the stillness.

The priest heard it, and made a slight noise at the door, to warn M. Lefevre that it was time to leave; but he had sunk upon his knees beside the couch, and bitter tears fell upon the hand he clasped as he prayed in anguish of spirit for this helpless and well-beloved child. It seemed to him at that moment that he felt the hopeless wretchedness of his condition, with a sense of utter abandonment by the great Master who had hitherto given him faith to endure all earthly ills without shrinking.

While M. Lefevre thus struggled with the evil spirit that he believed had entered his soul, a tall figure, wrapped in a loose dressing-robe of flowered silk, appeared in the open doorway leading into the next apartment. Bertha had heard the noise made by the sleeping Irene, slight as it was, and she arose at once to see if her cousin needed any thing. Though startled by the vision of the dark figure kneeling, at that hour of the night, beside the couch of her cousin, the silvery hair that flowed from his temples showed her that it was a man advanced in life, and she knew that it could be no other than her uncle; though how he gained entrance there, she was at a loss to comprehend.

Bertha was young, and she was a woman; therefore her sympathies were not utterly deadened by the fanatical faith which forbade their indulgence toward one differing from herself in belief. She stood motionless until the fierce struggle in the soul of the conscientious man had ceased, and he arose calm and reassured, believing that the providence which now seemed dark to him would yet be vindicated; and light to others, if not to himself, be the issue of that struggle in which right, freedom, and truth were brought at issue with darkness, superstition, and priestcraft.

M. Lefevre turned slowly from the couch, and, with a faint exclamation of surprise, confronted the stately figure of Mademoiselle de Montour. She was the first to speak.

"Monsieur, I have forbore to interrupt you while you bowed your knee before the Saviour to whom we alike appeal, but now I must ask why and how you came hither."

M. Lefevre pointed impressively to his sleeping child. "Why did I come hither? To behold my daughter once more, although I was refused any privilege beyond gazing on her as she sleeps. How? By the kindness of one whose position Mademoiselle de Montour will respect."

"Not my father's?"

She interrupted him:

"No; but one who—"

"Then there is treason beneath our roof, and the Sieur de Montour must be informed of it; for it is his will that you and Irene shall not meet."

"Neither have we met. Her spirit is sealed in sleep, and I have only gazed upon the casket, without communing with the soul within. Bertha, would you refuse this poor consolation to one situated as I am?"

She regarded him steadily, and then slowly said,

"What do you daily and hourly refuse to the great Author of our being? M. Lefevre, who assisted you to gain this apartment? I must know, that my father may deal with his unfaithful dependant as seems to him just."

"One more tolerant, more sympathetic than you are. Come and see for yourself, and then act."

This colloquy had been carried on in suppressed tones, and M. Lefevre now moved lightly toward the door. He unclosed it, and Mademoiselle de Montour seemed greatly startled when she beheld the priest holding a lamp in his hand, and awaiting her appearance with apparent composure. Aware of what was passing within, he was quite prepared to reply to her.

"You, holy father!" she exclaimed; "you the means of bringing M. Lefevre hither?"

"Even so, daughter. In virtue of my office of keeper of souls, I have consented that my heretical brother might look upon his daughter as she slept, in the belief that the sight of her, in her present condition, would bring to him a quicker consciousness of the necessity of embracing the truth than any other argument I could address to him. I have chosen this hour, because only now could he behold her without being himself recognized."

The habitual reverence for his calling in which Bertha had been trained caused her to receive this excuse with respect; but after a moment's pause she asked,

"Will this satisfy my father when he learns that his commands have been disobeyed?"

"He is not to know it, daughter. You are the only one who could communicate it to him, and I lay the command of the Church on you to remain silent."

Bertha bent her head submissively, for she dared not gainsay any command given in that name. Perfectly assured of her unquestioning obedience, the priest gave her his blessing and turned away.

M. Lefevre could not resist the impulse to pause a moment and say, "Be kind to my daughter, Bertha, for she needs it sadly."

The young lady drew herself proudly up.

"I will do all that duty prompts," she replied, as the door closed upon him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE scene of our story now changes for a brief space to the city of Amsterdam—that spot which had become the home of so many of the religious refugees from France, that whole quarters were populated by them; and the arts, manufactures, and literature which were driven forth by the blind policy of Louis XIV. found protection and development beneath the rule of William, Prince of Orange, who afterward became King of England, and carried with him into his new realm the same clear mind, and unflinching adherence to justice and freedom, bestowed on him by God for a great purpose.

It was the noon of a bright day in October, when a young officer walked slowly down a busy street swarming with people speaking the language of another land, wearing a quick and vivacious expression very different from that of the phlegmatic race among whom they had found an asylum. This was the French quarter. And the fine fabrics hitherto unknown out of France, which had brought an annual tribute of millions from other nations to her coffers, were here manufactured and offered for sale, thus giving a fatal blow to her supremacy in that department of commerce.

She had likewise thrust from her bosom many men of powerful intellect and vital piety, who might have aided in preserving her from the flood of infidelity that swept as a desolating torrent over the land in a succeeding generation; ending in that last and crowning horror, the Age of Reason, with its fit accompaniment, the sanguinary revolution.

The young stranger gazed with deep interest on these evidences of prosperity among his expatriated countrymen; for he too was a Frenchman, as his mission revealed; and he was also a Huguenot, though still in the service of the King of

France. His features were striking and noble, and his well-knit figure had an expression of ease and conscious power that seemed the perfection of a manly carriage.

He strolled slowly along, noting all he saw with interest; but, even amidst the occupation of mind thus afforded, bearing evidences of deep and painful thought in the compressed lips and mournful eyes that looked upon the busy world around, in the hope that objects of outward interest might possess the power to bring brief oblivion to the wearing care within. He had nearly reached the end of the street, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and, on turning, he confronted an individual dressed as a workingman, who called him by his name, though the officer could not recall his features as he gazed down upon them. The man respectfully said,

"Colonel Lefevre may not remember Gueran, the cap-maker, who once lived in Nismes, but I recognized him as soon as he passed my door. Excuse me, sir; but I ran after you to tell you that there is one in my house now who will be glad to see you. He brings news from Nismes of deep interest to you."

The young man changed color as he eagerly grasped his hand, and said,

"Thank you for your kindness, Gueran. I came hither to meet one who brings me letters; but news from my native place from any source is welcome. Can you tell me any thing of my own family?"

His earnest look made the little cap-maker shrink, when he remembered the disastrous history brought by a refugee who had escaped from Nismes since the occurrence of the events related in the preceding pages. He evasively said,

"Will monsieur come with me to my poor home? He has much to hear that will interest him, and my little room is better for that purpose than the open street."

Gerauld Lefevre accepted the invitation at once, and without another question accompanied his guide to a neighboring house, from the door of which the insignia of his trade hung out, inviting the inspection of the passer-by. A neat-look-

ing, dark-eyed woman was waiting in the shop, and her husband motioned to her to remain there, while he accompanied his guest to an apartment in the rear, and closed the door communicating with the outer one.

No sooner were they alone, than Gerauld turned to him and said, with deep emotion,

"Assure me of one thing, Gueran. My family, as yet, are safe from the persecutions which are desolating my native province?"

"M. Lefevre, I will bring you into the presence of one who can better tell you what has happened to them than I can. Last night two travelers from Nismes reached my house. One is the good pastor of the desert, M. Lecroix, who came by the way of Geneva, and has been many weeks reaching here; the other is my cousin, who traveled directly across the country, and brings later news: all of which the pastor is prepared to communicate to you."

Gerauld's expressive eyes were fixed on him. He said,

"And this news is evil, Gueran. I read it in your face—in your unwillingness to speak of my family. Bring me into the presence of the pastor as speedily as may be, for it is he I came hither to meet."

"Follow me, monsieur. M. Lecroix has the front room over the shop, and he has been expecting you."

They ascended a narrow stair-case, and in answer to the tap upon the door made by Gueran, the voice of M. Lecroix bade them enter. The cap-maker unclosed it, and announced Colonel Lefevre.

The old man arose quickly and advanced to meet him; the fervent grasp of his hand, and the expression of his features, told the young man that sympathy for himself was in his heart. Gerauld could only say,

"Tell me, M. Lecroix, in a word, if my father yet lives."

"He does; but I have a letter for you from Claude Chastain, which informs you of the late events in your home."

He drew the carefully preserved missive from a secret

pocket in his coat and gave it to the young man. Gueran, after ushering in Lefevre, had discreetly withdrawn; and Gerauld turned from his old friend to read the hurried lines which revealed the death of his mother, and the ruin to which the dragonnade had reduced his family. He covered his face with his hands, and remained silent many moments.

The pastor respected his grief too much to interrupt him. At length Lefevre turned, and, in a broken tone, said,

"And this was permitted while I was risking my life to serve the cause of an intolerant king. I believed that, in consideration of the services I have rendered in Flanders, my family would be exempted from persecution."

"Alas! my son, nothing weighs against the fanatical fury that rages against our unhappy people. Nothing is sacred in the estimation of the priesthood."

After a pause, Gerauld said,

"I have not yet heard all. Gueran spoke of more recent news from Nismes—from my father and sister. Let me know the worst at once."

The pastor gazed compassionately upon him as he said,

"Arm your soul with courage, Gerauld; you are a man, and a brave soldier; but the revelations I must make will shake your soul to its centre."

The young man met his glance unflinchingly, and he firmly said,

"Let me hear all that is to be told. I can bear it."

"May God give you strength to do so," fervently responded the pastor; and then with tender care he related the events which so closely followed his departure from Nismes. The bearer of the news had left the city two days after the massacre in the cavern, and up to that time the narrative was clear and succinct.

Lefevre listened to it with emotions he could not control. The desecration of his mother's remains—the burning of the chateau—filled him with anguish and fury. He paced the floor with gestures which told what passed in his soul. The scene in the cave drew tears and execrations from him.

When the narration was finished, he paused before its narrator, and solemnly said,

"From this hour I renounce my allegiance to the king whose bigotry thus fills my native land with suffering. To the tiger-heart of fanaticism every thing that is pure and noble is sacrificed. I will doff my uniform, relinquish my commission, and in another land seek some spot over which the smile of God may beam without asking permission from a venal and corrupt priesthood, who make the sacred cause of religion a curse and a mockery."

"Evil days have indeed fallen on us, my son; but you must exercise prudence to baffle the lynx eyes of our enemies. Use your military rank as a protection until you are safe out of this devoted country."

"True, it may do me good service; and much lies before me ere I can abandon my father-land. I must find the prison of my father—rescue him; tear my sister from our Papist uncle, who will stop at nothing to convert her. And Claude, poor Claude, what can I do for him? He is my sister's husband. I will claim his pardon and that of my father as the sole reward of my services; and they have been neither few nor unimportant. I must away to Paris as soon as possible."

"Whom have you there to push your cause at court, Gerould? for even a colonel in his majesty's service, distinguished for his personal prowess, stands little chance to meet with justice if he is known to be a Huguenot."

"I have a distant cousin there, who has been kind to me in other days. She has the reputation of being the most learned woman in France, and is distinguished by the friendship of Madame de Maintenon. Through Madame Dacier I can get a hearing, I am sure. That secured, I think I can make my own cause good."

"Heaven grant that you be not too sanguine," replied the pastor, with a sigh.

"The attempt is worth making, at all risks. If I shrink from any hazard now, I should be unworthy the name I bear," replied the young man, proudly. "Life can be sacri-

ficed but once, and it is better given in this cause than any other."

"Amen," said M. Lecroix, gravely; and for several moments there was silence between them. Gerauld paced the floor in deep and painful thought, revolving all he had lately heard in his mind, and endeavoring to shape some feasible plan of action which might enable him to rescue those who so sorely needed his assistance.

Gradually another memory, not less dear, asserted its claim to a portion of his interest. The real and imminent danger that menaced his family had, for a short time only, rendered him oblivious of another tie of vital importance to him. He again approached the pastor, and asked,

"Can you give me any information of Madame Altenberg and her daughter? It is long since I have heard any thing authentic from them, and since the death of M. Altenberg I have been in a state of miserable uncertainty concerning their fate."

"I can inform you of their position when I left Nismes, for I was at their chateau a few days before my departure. Madame Altenberg was then preparing to leave the country for that place, to present a petition to D'Aguesseau, the Intendant, and to the ecclesiastical court, to have her daughter legitimated, that she may inherit a fortune that has fallen to her from a relative of her father."

"Ha! that is news, indeed! And what chances of success had she before her?"

"I scarcely know. Both Madame Altenberg and her daughter are Papists, and their claims may be listened to by those in authority, provided a good sum from the estate is offered to sustain them."

"And Eugenia?" hesitatingly asked the lover; "how has she borne the death of her father, and the troubles that preceded it?"

"Mademoiselle Altenberg seemed languid and depressed. I visited their chateau because I had been in the habit of doing so in the lifetime of its master, and, I will own, with a

vague hope that Eugenia would yet adopt the purer faith of her father; but when I found how much her worldly prospects depended on her remaining in the pale of the Romish Church—and I knew what a gloomy fate she must embrace if she seceded from it—I said nothing to her on the subject. She has a tender heart, and an inherent sense of purity and right which will bring her to salvation, whether she be called Papist or Protestant: so I left her in the hands of God, to deal with as seemeth unto him good.”

“Right—right, good pastor; yet I could have wished Eugenia of my own faith. The day will, I trust, yet come to her when light will be brought out of darkness.”

“I was not aware that you cherish any particular interest for Mademoiselle Altenberg.”

“I do not hesitate to avow the truth. I have loved Eugenia from the first bright dawn of her charming girlhood; and it is the dearest hope of my heart to win her from priestly sway, to become the sharer of my future lot. Her father’s teachings have implanted the seeds of truth in her mind, and in time they must produce fruit.”

The pastor reflected a moment, and then said,

“I was at the French ambassador’s last night, and I there found letters which had just arrived for several of my friends. Among them was one for you. The Count d’Avaux is an old friend of mine, and when I informed him that you would probably visit me before calling on him, he permitted me to take charge of the package. It may contain something from Mademoiselle Altenberg.”

“Give it to me at once,” said Gerould, with difficulty repressing his eagerness to ascertain if it, indeed, contained a communication from Eugenia. After searching a few moments among his papers, the pastor found a parcel addressed to Colonel Gerould Lefevre, and bearing the official seal of the Intendant of Languedoc stamped upon it. In some surprise, he unclosed it, and found within an official notification that the estate to which he was heir had passed by purchase into the possession of Captain Delmont; and he was required,

as a non-conformist to the only Church recognized by law, to relinquish his right to the succession in favor of the new proprietor. His father, as a fugitive from the power of the Church, was no longer recognized as having any claim on the inheritance; but, since the son had served the king, means would be found in the future to compensate him for the loss to which he must now submit. The young officer tore the paper in anger and scorn, as he exclaimed,

"They are not contented with taking from us with the strong hand, but they must thus add insult to injury. Never shall my hand sign the deed that conveys the inheritance of my father to another. My title may be held as naught, but never will I sanction the wrong thus committed. Ha! here is another letter, with a mitre on the seal. Let me see what so powerful a prelate as the writer can have to say to the ruined and impoverished son of the man he has aided in crushing to the dust."

He tore open the envelope. From it fell two inclosures; and a glance at the writing on the back of one of them drove every drop of blood from his face, and caused his strong frame to tremble with emotion. He murmured, in a feeble tone,

"What can this mean? A letter from Eugenia inclosed in one from the Abbot of the Dominicans! My God! she can not surely have fallen into his power!"

He ran his dilating eyes over the few words written by the priest; and a faint feeling of sickness, never before felt, overcame him for a moment. As he read, his hand closed gradually on the paper with a vice-like clutch, as if he would wreak on the unoffending medium the stern emotions to which its contents gave rise.

"COLONEL LEFEVRE,—At the request of Mademoiselle Altenberg, I inclose you the last communication you will ever receive from her; as she is now within the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy, passing through a brief novitiate, preparatory to assuming the black veil.

"That this destiny is the one for which she feels she has a peculiar vocation, you will learn from her own words; and I have permitted them to go to you, as the surest means of ending an engagement which bears upon it the ban of our holy faith. In penitence and prayer, she has already expiated the sin of forming such a tie with a heretic; and for the future her heart will be devoted to the cause of her Creator, in the seclusion she is so admirably fitted by nature to appreciate.

"Respectfully,

ANTOINE DE CHALUS."

He crushed the letter, and with trembling hands unclosed that of Eugenia; for an instant the delicate characters flickered and faded before his excited vision, but making a strong effort to regain his self-control, Lefevre read these words:

"DEAREST FRIEND,—As such I may now indeed address you, for of those who have cherished and loved me you are the only one now left on earth. Since this will also be my last address to you while life lasts, I may permit myself to speak all the truth.

"My father, you know, has now been at rest several months; since his death my mother has failed in health, and here, with kind and sympathizing friends, she breathed her last a few nights since. This was a fearful blow, Gerould; for it left me alone in the wide, bewildering world, in times of great peril both to body and soul; but it strengthened a purpose which had been gradually forming in my mind, to dedicate my life to the service of Heaven.

"Pardon me this seeming wrong to you, my friend, and reflect how few chances existed of a future union between us. Once I looked forward to a change of religion as a matter of course, when I became your wife; for my education had prepared me to view such a result without any conscientious scruples. Such is no longer the case, Gerould. I now believe fully in the superior claims of the Romish Church, and I bow before its authority. The right path

has been pointed out to me, and I feel that it is my duty to walk in it.

"But I must tell you how I came to be guided where the instruction I needed was gained. I recognize in it the hand of Providence, and bow before my destiny. My mother came with me to Nismes to prosecute my claim to an inheritance which had fallen to me since the death of my father. To legalize my claim, the law must be set aside which prevents children springing from the union of a Catholic and Protestant from inheriting property. Through our petition for redress, our cause came before that good man, the Abbot of the Dominican order in this place. He visited us in our humble home, interested himself in our behalf, and caused us to remove to the convent of the Sisters of Mercy, a few miles from the city; where I have been gradually enlightened as to the will of Heaven concerning my future fate.

"My rights have been established, and when Father Antoine communicated to me the result of his efforts to serve me, he left me at liberty to choose whether I would remain with those who had so kindly received me, or return to that world which I have learned to consider a delusion and a snare.

"My choice was already made. I am unfit to struggle with difficulty; I love the quiet and seclusion in which I can cultivate the purer and nobler portion of my nature. The voice of God spoke loudly in my soul to choose the better part, and leave the turmoil of existence to those more able to bear its burden. Ah! Gerault, if you could know—if you could comprehend the heavenly peace that has dwelt in my soul since my choice was made, you would fully justify it; though I know it will inflict suffering upon your true and manly soul.

"Gerault, forgive me, for I feel I am not worthy of your love. If I were, I should ere now have returned it with all the fervor of my spirit; for there are depths in my soul that have never been sounded—a fountain of tenderness that

must now be sealed to the passion of love; though it may flow forth in acts of Christian benevolence, and compassion toward the sorrowful and the suffering. Do not think hardly of me for this confession, my dear friend; nor feel that I have not appreciated your attachment at its true value. Had we been more together—had my heart been satisfied that our union was right, and must take place in the future, my feelings would have been different.

“But much as I admire you—grateful as I felt for your preference—a latent feeling that we were laying up future repentance for ourselves, caused me, intuitively, to check the rising preference; and although I have been long betrothed to you, I scarcely regarded the contract as having the blessing of Heaven upon it. Now I know I had it not; it has been brought to a test which satisfies me that I am right in severing the tie, and thus saving both our hearts from vain regrets and bitter domestic troubles in a union that could never have been happy.

“By special grace, I am permitted to write this, Gerould; and no other eye will behold its contents until it reaches yours. That you may appreciate my motives for acting thus; that you may relinquish the hopes you have so long cherished, without too great suffering to your noble and generous heart, is the earnest prayer of mine.

“Once assured that you are again happy—that your life is unclouded by the memory of this broken affection, and my heart will sing its glad psalm of thanks in the serene and Eden-like seclusion I have chosen in which to pass the remainder of my life.

“Adieu, and may the merciful All Father have you in his holy keeping.

EUGENIA ALTENBERG.”

Many moments of unbroken silence passed after Lefevre perused this letter. He had thrown his arms across the table, and his bowed head rested upon them, so as to conceal the traces of the struggle that shook his manly soul. It seemed that Fate had conspired in one hour to crush him,

for all the trials of his past life were as trifles to this accumulation of evils.

Hard to bear as was the desolation of his household, this last blow struck deeper to his heart than even that. Yet his own disappointment was felt less than the certainty that Eugenia was deceived; and when the irrevocable vow was made that bound her as with bonds of iron, she would, when too late, become aware of the fatal nature of the step she had taken.

Strong soldier as he was, Lefevre wept a few bitter tears, each one of which seemed to leave a scar upon his heart. He felt no shame in this, for the bravest souls are always tender; but he quickly roused himself from the indulgence of his feelings. He must act promptly if he would regain the mastery of his own spirit; if he would save those that were dear to him from the fangs of the Inquisition. He pushed the letters toward the pastor, and said,

"Read those, M. Lecroix, and see how completely Mademoiselle Altenberg has fallen under Romish influence. There is nothing in them that I may not show you. Take first that of the arch-hypocrite, the abbot, and then read the words of my poor, deluded Eugenia. Oh! I must lose no time in flying to the spot, and making an effort, at least, to rescue her from the wretched destiny she is so anxious to embrace."

The pastor slowly perused the letters. He laid them down, and sighed heavily.

"Alas! my young friend, I had no idea that it would ever come to this pass with her, or I should have spoken such words to Eugenia when we last met as must have caused her to use her own judgment in this vital matter, and not permit herself to be blindly led into the snare prepared by the evil craft of others."

"And that warm heart that might have diffused such sunshine over her home—that gentle feminine nature, with its sweet witchery, must be buried in the dreary and ascetic ceremonies of a Church whose essence is form, with

nothing vital—nothing that can satisfy the mind seeking after truth. May Heaven in its infinite mercy aid me to rescue her, or she is lost forever, not only to me, but to happiness and self-respect.”

“My son, delude not yourself with the hope that you can ever save from its fangs any victim over whom the Romish Church has obtained power. Eugenia is lost to you. All we can now ask is, that her delusion may continue unbroken—that she may find happiness in the path she has chosen.”

The lover sighed heavily. He could not yet take this view of it. Hurriedly walking the floor until he gained the mastery of his emotion, he at length approached the pastor, and, wringing his hand, said,

“Farewell! good friend. I must go at once to our ambassador, and obtain such credentials as will take me in safety through France. I must reach Languedoc as speedily as possible.”

“It is best thus,” replied the pastor. “The Count d’Avaux is friendly to our people, and he remonstrates without ceasing with the government at home for driving into exile the most industrious portion of the population. The king listens to nothing, for he is completely under the influence of the Jesuit, La Chaise, who persuades him that he can atone to Heaven for his own sinful life by persecuting God’s people; and massacre, blood, and tortures, are the oblations offered at the shrine of the meek and loving Jesus by this priest-ridden monarch. The ambassador will aid you; for, although he is a Papist, he feels as a man and a brother Christian should toward those who differ from him in belief.”

The two parted; and, after bidding a kindly adieu to Gueran, Lefevre hurried with feverish haste to the quarter of the city in which he knew the Count d’Avaux dwelt. He was ushered into a private apartment of his hotel, where he found him alone. The ambassador received him with great courtesy, and said,

“My reception hours for the morning are over, Colonel

Lefevre; but your name recalled the gallant services rendered by you in our army, and I was induced to depart from my usual rule not to receive applicants on business after a certain time."

"Thanks, M. le Comte, for the considerate courtesy. It is one I am in a condition to appreciate, I assure you. News of a most disastrous character from my native home renders my presence there necessary, and I come as a petitioner to you to give me without delay such passports as will enable me first to visit Paris, and thence to travel in safety to Nismes. I came hither to meet an old friend, who I knew had visited my native province, and from him I have received such accounts as renders my presence in Languedoc an imperative duty."

"Alas! I can well understand why you, a Huguenot gentleman, would visit the province over which that human tiger, D'Aguesseau, holds his rule. It is a disgrace to France, in the sight of every civilized nation of the earth, that she permits her soil to be desecrated by these inhuman persecutions. Daily are such accounts sent to me as are sufficient to make a man with a heart in his bosom throw up his service in disgust. The treaties I have made have been defeated by these fanatical cruelties, and the only reply vouchsafed to my remonstrances was, that the king's conscience could not be satisfied so long as a single Huguenot refused to acknowledge the infallibility of the Pope. Ah! well I am a Catholic; but I can scarcely say, God forgive the priests for the abominations they commit to crush that free spirit of inquiry which threatens to curtail the spiritual power Rome has so long wielded."

"I am happy to find one Catholic, at least, who admits that my unhappy brethren complain not without just cause," replied Lefevre; "that, as men, they are entitled to some consideration, even if they differ in opinion from the ruling powers."

"Believe me, monsieur, that there are many conscientious and true Catholics, who would gladly aid you, if the severity of the times permitted them to do so without being suspect-

ed of heresy themselves. But you spoke of stopping at Paris. Have you friends there whose influence you wish to enlist?"

"None of much importance in a worldly point of view; but such as I possess I must endeavor to enlist in my cause. Both my father and brother-in-law are imprisoned, awaiting their trial by a court of inquisitors; and you know to what that must lead in times like these. Since early youth, I have faithfully served the king, and won my promotion on the field of battle. As my reward, all I now ask is the extension of the royal clemency to these near relatives, that I may rescue them from the imminent peril in which they stand."

The count listened to him with evident sympathy. He said, in reply,

"There is but one person at court to whom I can give you a letter that will be of any use. The Jesuits take care to keep from the king all those who could enlighten him as to the true nature of the conversions constantly reported to him as occurring by thousands. I do not know that the Duchess of Orleans can materially serve you; but she is a German princess, and therefore has some sympathies with the Huguenots. Just now, it is the policy of the king and Madame de Maintenon to conciliate her, as they are anxious to bring about a marriage between her son, the Duc de Chartres, and Mademoiselle de Blois. She is a coarse woman, but one possessing truth and sincerity, rare qualities to be met with in a court. If you can interest Madame d'Orleans, she can procure you an audience from his majesty."

"Many thanks for your kindness, monsieur. I gratefully accept it, and now have only to beg that you will expedite my passports as much as possible, as I have not a moment to lose if I would be in time to save my friends."

"They shall be ready for you in three hours. Send or call for them, and they shall be delivered promptly."

Again repeating his thanks, Colonel Lefevre bade the ambassador a friendly adieu, and took his leave.

In the evening he set out for Paris, and traveled almost without stopping until he reached the city, wayworn and sad, but with a strength of purpose that would not be baffled.

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER a few hours given to the repose he so greatly needed, Colonel Lefevre arose and prepared to visit his kinswoman. The father of Madame Dacier, Janaquil Lefevre, was a professor in the College of Saumur, and thither Gerauld had been sent to receive his intellectual training.

Anne, the celebrated daughter of a learned father, was sufficiently the senior of her young relative to assume toward him the position of a grave elder sister, and some of Gerauld's pleasantest recollections of college days were associated with her image. It was now many years since they had parted; he to join the army—she to pursue the severe studies in which she delighted, until her marriage with M. Dacier, a man of equal learning and congenial tastes, brought her to Paris to pursue her distinguished career as a woman of letters.

An occasional communication still passed between the cousins, and Lefevre knew in what quarter to seek her abode. It was not many squares from his hotel, and in the sunshine of a pleasant October day he walked over the same streets which had once been deluged with the blood of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Eve, and thought in his heart that it was only a few degrees worse than the proscription which now triumphed against those of his creed.

Lefevre asked himself if no retribution was ever to arrive to these royal rulers for the terrible misuse of their power. Could the power of prevision have been bestowed upon him, that he might have beheld the ghastly head of the weakest and most inoffensive of the Bourbon race held up before those who had been forced to deny the divine rights of kings, he would have been answered.

In a retired street, removed from the bustle and hum of the city, he found the residence of M. Dacier. He occupied the first floor in an old rambling house, the rear windows of which opened on a yard filled with gnarled and knotty-looking trees. On account of these rural accessories, this apartment was used as a sitting-room. A few plants bloomed in the windows, and a wire cage, containing a singing-bird, was suspended among them.

This room was tastefully but not expensively fitted up; and at a desk between two large windows sat a bright, intelligent-looking woman, of about thirty-five, with a large tome open before her, from which she was gathering that learned lore that was the chief pleasure of her life.

Gerauld had no sooner sent in his name, than Madame Dacier started up with a most vivacious expression of welcome upon her expressive features.

"Ah! a thousand times welcome, my dear Gerauld!" she exclaimed, as she clasped his hand in both her own. "Yet I declare I should never have known you again. Why, cousin, you have grown as black and as old as M. Dacier himself."

"I believe I am not many years younger," he replied, with a smile; "for, if I remember rightly, M. Dacier was at Saumur at the same time I was a pupil there."

She laughed merrily, and said,

"See the boyish conceit of those days peeping out now. Why, my husband was at the head of the classes when you were a lad of sixteen. He is verging toward forty, and—let me see—you must be twenty-eight."

"True; but with a heart so heavy—so sorrowful, that I might bear the burden of threescore. Cousin Anne, I have come to you in my trouble, to see if you can aid me in a dire strait for those I love."

Instantly her manner changed. She led him to a seat, and, placing herself beside him, said, in a voice of kind sympathy,

"Come and tell me all about it. Count on my services

as surely as in those boyish days when you used to get in scrapes, from which I helped you to extricate yourself."

"Always kind, always generous! I have no words to thank you. But tell me, have you any power at court?"

"N—o, not power, exactly; but I have the means of gaining admittance to Madame de Maintenon, who patronizes me, and she, you know, is all-powerful with the king. Indeed, it is whispered that a marriage between them has actually taken place. Tell me what you desire, and I will see what I can do for you."

"I must gain an audience of the king. But he is so surrounded by the Jesuits, that I fear it will be difficult for one of my faith to obtain admittance to him, especially as my object is to tell him how much his authority is abused in the southern provinces. Listen to the tale I have to relate, cousin; and, if you will remember that this is one history out of thousands equally atrocious, you may form some conception of the persecutions daily going on against a peaceful people, whose only crime is that they can not conscientiously worship God as the king commands. His majesty is led to believe that the Reformation is crushed, when, spite of the forced conversions, it never at any period possessed more vitality. Persecution never yet stifled God's truth, and it never will."

The face of his listener lighted brilliantly. She fervently said,

"I know it; I feel it. My husband and myself, as you know, have both been educated to conform to the prevailing faith; but of late years this great question has come before us. We have examined it for ourselves, and we also have become Huguenots. We have not yet openly avowed our change of opinion, but we shall soon do so. Come, tell me this history, which I sadly fear is that of your own family."

"It is; and when you have heard it, you will see the imminent need there is that I shall personally appeal to the clemency of the king."

Madame Dacier listened with absorbing attention while

Gerauld related the story of his father's wrongs and Chastain's imprisonment. At its close, she maintained a depressed silence for several moments. She at length said,

"Ah! this is terrible! The dead torn from their graves; the living massacred, without a chance to defend themselves. If the king could only hear the truth, he surely would redress such wrongs. Gerauld, you must see him. I have an appointment to visit Madame de Maintenon to-night at nine, to read to her a portion of my translation of Homer. She takes great pleasure in such literary avocations. I will venture to take you with me in place of my footman, and you can wait in the ante-chamber until I find an opportunity to plead for your admittance. The king joins these evening readings, and, if I can only have courage to do my part, we may be able to gain what you desire without any unnecessary delay."

"God bless you, Anne, for your zeal. If you can accomplish this, I shall indeed feel indebted to you."

"I promise to do my best; but, in the event of my failure, have you no other resource?"

"Yes; one more. Count d'Avaux gave me a letter to the Duchess of Orleans, which he thought might be of use to me."

Madame Dacier burst into a merry laugh.

"Ah! the poor duchess," she exclaimed. "I am afraid she will not help you much just now, for she is furious at the marriage which is arranged between her son and Montespán's daughter. A few evenings since, she absolutely turned her back on his majesty in the court circle when he offered her his respects; and they do say that she slapped the Duc de Chartres on the face, in her anger that he submitted to such a union. At all events, you may as well deliver your letter; it may help you to a friend in time of need. The Hôtel d'Orleans is only a few squares from here, and the duchess holds her levée from eleven until three."

Consulting a small time-piece that stood on a carved stand near her, she added,

"It is now about time for you to go, and you can return hither and tell me the result of the interview. I shall expect you to dine with us, and you will then see M. Dacier. He has gone into the city on business, but will be back in time for dinner."

Lefevre accepted the invitation, and proceeded at once to the Hôtel d'Orleans, since so famous in history as the Palais Royal. He found many retainers lounging about the court-yard, but they were the gentlemen of the duke's household, and did not trouble themselves concerning an applicant for admittance to the duchess. Since Gaston d'Orleans and his wife merely maintained outward civility toward each other, the retainers of the duke considered it useless to trouble themselves about those seeking a person so destitute of the power to serve them as the Duchess of Orleans.

At length a heavy, fair-looking man crossed the entrance, and one of them said to Lefevre,

"There is the chamberlain of Madame la Duchesse; he will show you the way to her reception-room, which I fancy you will not find much crowded."

Saying this with a light laugh, he spoke to the chamberlain, who turned to the young officer and courteously requested him to follow him. Lefevre did so, and after passing through a suite of apartments fitted up in the heavy style of that day, he was requested to wait in a small ante-chamber until his companion announced him.

In a few moments he was summoned to her presence, and to his surprise he found the duchess quite alone. She was lounging in a large chair with a table before her, on which lay the open pages of the journal which has bequeathed to succeeding generations a faithful daguerreotype of the woman herself, together with pictures of the times and court in which she lived, that render it a matter of indignant surprise that the chief actor in those scenes should place himself at the head of a religious persecution more intolerant than any the world has witnessed.

The portrait of her person, drawn by her own pen, was by no means exaggerated. Short of stature, with a heavy, ungainly figure, a broad flat face, wide mouth, and small unmeaning eyes, which often twinkled with malice, but were otherwise destitute of expression—such was Charlotte Elizabeth of Bavaria, the successor of the charming and piquante Henrietta of England, whose presence beneath the same roof with her husband was only tolerated by him.

As Colonel Lefevre bowed low before her, she scanned him with her deep-set eyes, and seemed rather pleased with the frank face and prepossessing exterior of her visitor. She greeted him with less brusquerie than was usual with her, and said,

“To what am I indebted for the pleasure of M. Lefevre’s call? It is not often that strangers find it convenient or necessary to visit one so powerless to serve them as I am.”

“Madame, I am the bearer of a letter to you from the Count d’Avaux, from which you will learn my object in troubling you with my presence.”

With graceful courtesy he presented the missive, and the duchess at once glanced over its contents. Gerauld watched her face as she read, and saw, from the sudden sparkle of her eyes, that some emotion moved her. She closed it, and quickly said,

“The Count d’Avaux has the ill judgment to request me to gain an audience for you from the king. As this would involve a concession on my part to the ‘old hog’ Maintenon, I would sooner cut out my tongue than request it. I am sorry for you, monsieur; but I can not help you. I will tell you this much, as you seem to be a stranger in the city. An ordinance has been issued commanding all Protestants who have come to Paris within a year to return to their provinces within the space of four days, under a penalty of a thousand livres. This is the last day of grace granted, and I would advise you not to be found in Paris after nightfall. Some crushing blow is about to be dealt against those of your belief, and I give you this warning,

because I am a German woman, who has learned in her native land that the Huguenots are not the worst citizens."

"I thank you, madame, for the warning; but at all risks to myself, I must endeavor to obtain an audience of the king. From his royal clemency I would ask the life of two dear friends, and my past career gives me at least a right to a hearing."

"Royal clemency!" repeated the duchess, contemptuously. "I tell you that such a thing is unknown to that selfish old bigot, the King of France. His heart is as hard as stone, and his conscience in the keeping of the rascally Jesuits, who make him believe that heaven is to be gained by wading through a sea of blood and torture. But take good notice 'tis not his blood, nor that of his favorites; only that of men ready and willing to sacrifice life for truth; a thing that Louis never heard, and if he had, he would have been unable to comprehend it. What sympathy can religious reformers expect to find in a court filled with vice, hypocrisy, and fanaticism? In short, where that incarnation of the three is found in its ruling spirit, the old wretch Maintenon?"

Suddenly the duchess became aware that her hostility to Madame de Maintenon had caused her to speak so imprudently before a stranger, and she hastily waved her hand to dismiss him. A bell summoned the chamberlain, and Lefevre was again conducted to the entrance, and bowed out with courteous ceremony by that personage.

Gerauld could scarcely repress a smile as he recalled the characteristic interview in which he had just played a part. Rude, vehement, but not destitute of good qualities, the Duchess of Orleans had vindicated the reputation she enjoyed of being the only woman in the court of Louis who spoke from the impulse that really moved her. Her sarcasms were passed by as harmless, because she had neither the art nor the power to do more than inflict a passing sting, which was set down to the score of her ill temper. The gay and heartless flutterers in the blaze of royal favor lit-

tle dreamed that her caustic pen was bequeathing many of them to everlasting infamy in the pages of her daily journal.

Gerauld could not resist the curiosity of Madame Dacier, who, on his return to her house, plied him with questions until the particulars of the interview became known to her. She laughed over it, and said,

"It is just like her; but I am sorry she will not befriend you. Her influence is not great; but in case I fail, it might have been a resource. Ah! well, we must hope for the best, and keep a brave heart. When the life of those we love is at stake, it does not do to grow faint-hearted at the commencement of the battle. But the ordinance commanding the departure of the Protestants I had not heard of. M. Dacier and myself have been so busy of late with our classics, that we have scarcely been out at all. In truth, we bury our heads in books, until the affairs passing around us are forgotten. But this is a matter that should be known to us. Never mind, Gerauld, we can keep you safe, at all events, and smuggle you out of the city without any one knowing that you have transgressed the order, except the king himself, if you are so lucky as to see him, and he will scarcely cause a gallant officer like yourself to be arrested for lingering a few hours longer than is permitted. But to make every thing sure, you must remove from your hotel at once, for every suspected stranger there will be pounced on by the police. Come to us; I can manage to make you comfortable for a night without materially incommoding ourselves, and to-morrow you will, I trust, be able to get away in safety."

Lefevre thanked her, and proceeded at once to make such arrangements as were necessary to enable him to change his quarters, and facilitate his departure at daylight on the following morning; for, successful in his object or not, he felt that Paris was no longer a safe place for one bent on such an errand as his own. As great caution was necessary to evade the lynx eyes of the police, several hours were consumed before he could succeed in accomplishing his errand to his satisfaction.

Lefevre returned to M. Dacier's in time to receive the cordial greeting of that gentleman before sitting down to an exquisitely-served little dinner, for Madame Dacier prided herself as much on her cuisine as on her classical knowledge; and all the reading world are familiar with the anecdote of M. Dacier finding a receipt for making a rare dish in Apicius, which the accomplished wife undertook to follow; the result, however, was not encouraging, for both of them nearly lost their lives by partaking of it.

When they arose from the table it was nearly time to fill the appointment at the Louvre. M. Dacier had an engagement to meet several of his learned brethren to discuss some question of interest to the Academy, and he left his wife to be escorted by her kinsman. Wrapping a dark cloak over his uniform, Gerauld walked beside the sedan chair in which Madame Dacier was carried, alternately hoping and fearing for the result of the errand on which he was bound.

This was not the first time Colonel Lefevre had been at the palace. On the occasion of his first promotion, he was made the bearer of dispatches announcing the victory. He had then been granted an interview with the king, and received from his royal lips commendations for his gallantry in the recent action. But now he came as a petitioner for mercy toward those who had offended the deep-seated religious prejudices of Louis, and he feared that his prayer for pardon might be denied.

They at length reached the immense pile of buildings occupied by the royal household, which, throughout its whole extent, was one blaze of light. But from the open doors no strains of music or revelry were wafted as in days of yore, when the monarch was the gayest and most magnificent prince in Europe.

Louis had exhausted the pleasures of life, and turned to devotion as a new source of interest to his palled and worn-out mind. This change is doubtless to be attributed, in a great measure, to the influence Madame de Maintenon had gradually established over him, and to that of the Jesuit

priests she was the means of placing about him. The attachment between those personages is a curious episode in the history of the human heart: both were past their youth; the lady the elder in years, but younger in heart and feeling than the blasé monarch. She first charmed him by her display of feeling on the death of one of his children, to whom she was governess. Wearied with the heartlessness that surrounded him, this sensibility had a peculiar charm for the monarch, and he said,

"She knows well how to love, and there would be pleasure in being loved by her."

This was the commencement of a long attachment full of romantic incidents and sentimental episodes, which ended in a private marriage in the oratory at Versailles; thus making the widow of the crippled jester, Scarron, the wife of the haughtiest potentate in Europe. To accomplish this, her influence over the king must have been unbounded; and some writers have been found to endeavor to remove from her memory the stigma of having used this influence for the destruction of the Huguenots. She certainly did not use it in their favor, as there is abundant evidence to prove; for the defect in her character, intense love of approbation, prevented her from advocating opinions that were unpopular with those by whom she was daily surrounded.

A writer of those times has said, "The first of religions for Louis XIV. was the belief in the royal authority. Ignorant in matters of doctrine, superstitious in his devotion, he pursued a real or imaginary heresy as an act of disobedience, and thought to expiate his faults by persecution."

A tyrant in heart, his ignorant fanaticism was deepened and confirmed by the execrable fraternity of the Jesuits, of which it is supposed he eventually became a lay member; thus binding himself to the terrible obligations imposed on them, regardless of that higher accountability delegated to him by Heaven itself.

The chair of Madame Dacier was taken into a spacious saloon, in which lounged a number of the nobles attached

to the court. They were amusing themselves with various games of chance, for the piety of Louis did not prohibit the most reckless gambling, nor take cognizance of the infamous frauds practiced habitually among persons holding a high position about his person.

The sedan chair was set down close beside a door over which hung a heavy damask curtain : this was the entrance to a corridor leading to the private apartments of Madame de Maintenon ; and the fair visitor passed into it at once, leaving her young kinsman to amuse himself with the court gallants, until summoned to the important interview.

Several of the nobles present were not unknown to Lefevre ; but he was careful to keep his cloak wrapped closely over his uniform, and his hat drawn over his brow in such a manner as to prevent himself from being recognized. At a card-table opposite to him sat three of the most conspicuous courtiers of the times—the Duc de St. Simon, Count Anthony Hamilton, and the Duc de Grammont. All three have left written records behind them showing the utter baseness and profligacy of the court, and their own subserviency to it ; but, to all outward seeming, three more elegant or accomplished cavaliers could not be found.

“Ha!” said St. Simon, “there goes the Dacier to impart some crumbs of her learning to the feminine ruler of France.”

“No wonder madame cultivates a classic taste,” said De Grammont, “for those old writers give most spirit-stirring accounts of the battles fought and the blood shed for the aggrandizement of some favorite hero. But *her* ambition soars even higher than that ; she desires a heavenly crown, which is to be won by the groans and anguish of the miserable heretics.”

“Messieurs, you are very imprudent,” remonstrated Hamilton ; “here, in the king’s ante-chamber, such words might cost you your freedom.”

De Grammont shrugged his shoulders

“To-night the Jesuits are too busy consummating their crowning iniquity to have time to listen to or report them ;

so we are safe. See, there comes the chancellor from the king's closet. I never see him without picturing to myself a beast of prey still licking his jaws stained with blood."

Lefevre looked with interest toward the person thus spoken of, and he could but acknowledge the justice of the comparison. An old man, evidently broken in health, with a most sinister and cruel face, on which an expression of exultation now rested, came slowly from the cabinet of the king. In his hand he carried a seal, which he seemed to regard with a species of ecstatic reverence. This was Le Tellier, the father of the minister Louvais, and one of the chief advisers of Louis. The last energies of his life were devoted to accomplishing the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. This crowning act of fanatical devotion had just been consummated, and the official seal he carried in his hand he designed for no farther use. After stamping it upon the document in the presence of his royal master, he said,

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

Such was the scene in which Le Tellier had just acted, and he passed through the ante-chamber without casting a look to right or left, seemingly absorbed with the great wrong which had just been consummated against thousands of the inoffensive subjects of his royal master. His profane prayer was granted; for within ten days from that time his fanatical spirit was summoned to that bar where purity of heart, and not outward conformity, is the standard by which the deeds done in the body shall be rewarded.

The chancellor had disappeared, when a page came to Lefevre and requested him to follow him. He arose immediately, and was conducted through a long corridor, at the end of which a door unclosed and admitted him into a small apartment lighted by a crystal lamp suspended from the ceiling by silver chains. The heavily-carved furniture that was the fashion of the day, covered with crimson damask, gave a sombre look to the room, which purple silk hangings looped with cords of gold did not relieve.

But the visitor scarcely glanced at the surroundings, so

much more interesting did he find the chief occupant of the chamber. At the upper end of the apartment, in a large chair, sat a lady of dignified and most imposing appearance. Though now quite fifty, Madame de Maintenon, seen by a soft light, might have passed for thirty-five; and she still retained much of that beauty which had been the admiration of the wits and men of taste who assembled around the couch of her first husband.

Her face was oval, her hair of a dark brown, with a complexion fair almost to pallor, with black eyebrows and lashes, shading eyes that were dark, soft, and sparkling. Her features were delicately cut, and full of intelligence, but at the same time touched with an expression of melancholy. The carriage of her head, and her finely turned shoulders, gave her an appearance of rare distinction, which rendered it by no means a matter of surprise that she should have captivated a man of such fastidious taste as Louis XIV.

Madame Dacier stood near a table turning over the leaves of a book, but evidently in a state of considerable agitation. She named her kinsman as he advanced toward the august dame, whose eyes were fixed immovably upon him; and as Lefevre bowed low before her, Madame de Maintenon addressed him in a voice of liquid softness, which doubtless aided in conquering the heart of her royal lover.

"M. Lefevre, at the earnest solicitation of my friend, Madame Dacier, I have consented to what may bring upon me the displeasure of the King of France; but it seems to me that he who knows how to defend the honor of his country, as you have done, should have some favor shown him in his hour of need."

"Thanks, madame, a thousand thanks for this great favor. I will bear with me a grateful remembrance of your kindness to the latest hour of my life."

"Do not expect too much from it, monsieur; for I have only consented to give you an opportunity to plead your own cause with his majesty. I expect him every moment, and to him your application must be made."

While she spoke, the hangings were lifted from a corner of the wall, and Louis himself stepped into the apartment. No longer the gay and debonnaire, but the grave and haughty embodiment of self-will and pride, the countenance of the king wore an unusual expression of sternness, for his hand had just completed the crowning iniquity of his reign. He came directly from the signature of that act which revoked the rights guaranteed to the descendants of those men to whom his great ancestor, Henry IV., owed his crown.

With a slight inclination of his head toward Madame Dacier, he advanced at once to the chair of state on which Madame de Maintenon sat. Lifting her fair hand to his lips, he said,

"Madame, the act is consummated which enables me to enforce the expressed law of God in my kingdom. Henceforth there shall be but 'one fold and one shepherd.'"

"Sire," she replied, "rather suffer me to press my lips upon that hand which has had courage to perform this great act. No doubt, the angels in heaven sing a psalm of joy over the benighted souls that will be forced to accept salvation through your means;" and she arose and reverently bent her knee before him as she pressed her lips upon his hand.

The king smiled blandly as he raised her and replaced her in her chair, for this was the species of flattery that most pleased him; and his fair enslaver had sufficient tact to offer it in such a manner as always to meet the demands of his egotistical and self-idolizing nature. Hence the secret of that influence which she preserved to the end of a long life, though retained at the cost to herself of self-respect and happiness.

Louis then turned to the stranger and asked, with a smile,

"Has Madame Dacier brought with her another savant to assist in expounding the beauties of classical literature, in the person of one of the officers of my army? He must be more accomplished than they often are, to enable him to do this."

"Sire," replied Madame de Maintenon, "permit me to present to you Monsieur Lefevre, who holds the rank of colonel in the Army of Flanders. He has once before had the honor to be admitted to your presence."

The king turned graciously toward him.

"I remember the occasion, Colonel Lefevre, and I trust you are again the bearer of good news from the army."

Lefevre bowed profoundly, and replied,

"No, sire, private business of a most painful and pressing nature brings me hither on the present occasion. Will your majesty deign to listen to your faithful servant a few moments, and grant the sole reward he asks for honorable service rendered, in the pardon of two dear friends who are suffering under the ban of the Church?"

The face of the monarch darkened, and he sternly said,

"By the holy faith I profess, you seem to expect more than my clemency is willing to grant. Any other crime than that I might pardon; but unfaithfulness to the teachings of the Church is a sin that calls for punishment on earth as well as in heaven."

"But, sire, it is my father for whose life I petition; my brother, who lies in a dungeon, awaiting death. If my services have any claim, and I bear many scars upon my body, received in fighting your majesty's battles, I ask, as my sole reward, that you will grant me a pardon for these two near relatives."

Louis coldly asked,

"What do you mean by saying that they await death? My confessor, La Chaise, and my minister, Louvais, have both pledged themselves that not a drop of blood shall be shed in bringing back the sheep that have strayed from the true fold."

"Alas! sire, they keep back the truth from your royal ears. While your dominions are laid desolate, and the cry of perishing thousands arises to Heaven in vain, your advisers persuade you that it is a peaceful crusade in favor of the Romish Church they are carrying on. If I dared re-

veal to you all I could tell, you would shrink from the picture of the sufferings inflicted on your unhappy people in the name of religion."

"I have no desire to listen to such a history from the lips of one of that misguided sect, the Huguenots. I can well anticipate what it would be," replied the king, with haughty displeasure. "Am I not right, M. Lefevre, in supposing you to be a believer in this fatal heresy?"

"Your majesty is correct in your surmise. I am a believer in the Reformation, but, at the same time, a loyal and faithful subject of the King of France," replied Lefevre, with grave dignity.

"And in the latter character I reply to your petition," said Louis, more graciously; for there was a noble seriousness in the deportment of the young officer that unconsciously influenced him in his favor. "Tell me the offense of your relatives more circumstantially, and if my conscience enables me to do so, I will not deny this grace to one who has shed his blood in my service."

With few and well chosen words Lefevre rapidly gave an outline of the persecutions and present position of his father and his friend. Louis seemed to listen with interest. At its close, he decisively said,

"To your father I will grant a pardon under my own royal seal, as a personal grace to yourself, Colonel Lefevre. He seems a mistaken zealot, who may be brought back to the truth by the workings of the spirit of God; but your friend—has he, too, been reared with the heretical taint that has caused such trouble to the faithful hearts of all true Catholics?"

Lefevre's heart painfully contracted at this question; but he could not withhold the truth.

"He was not," he reluctantly replied. "Claude Chastain is a proselyte."

"Then he must bear the punishment due to one who has seceded from the only true Church, after being educated in its tenets. I grant much to your services when I pardon

your father; expect no farther clemency at my hands. Monsieur, your audience is ended. Madame Dacier, there will be no reading to-night; my mind is not in a mood for it. You are at liberty to retire."

The two thus dismissed made a low obeisance before the august personages who held the evil destinies of France in their hands, and left the apartment.

The page reconducted them to the saloon, where they found the tables deserted, and groups of eager talkers collected together discussing some topic of absorbing interest. The two passed unnoticed among them, and Madame Dacier found her chair awaiting her in the vestibule. She hurriedly entered it, and they lost no time in regaining the shelter of her mansion.

When they were again alone, she drew a long breath, and exclaimed,

"Well! it ended better than I had dared to hope. Your father, at least, is saved."

"That is, indeed, much to be thankful for; but poor Chastain's fate is sealed, I sadly fear. I must see what daring can do for him, when I get on the spot."

"Be careful, Gerauld, or you may yourself fall into the power of the priests."

"Be sure I shall take every care to evade them, until I can effect my escape from this unhappy country. A few more weeks, and, if I am fortunate, I shall be beyond its boundaries."

While they conversed the servant brought in supper, before which they had scarcely seated themselves when a loud rap came to the door, and in a few moments one of the king's equerries was ushered in. Bowing courteously, he presented a sealed envelope to Lefevre, with the words, "From the King," and immediately departed. It was the promised pardon; and with a feeling of deep relief he secured it carefully about his person. Immediately afterward M. Dacier came in, and again they seated themselves, and an hour passed in conversation.

It was growing late, and as Gerauld must depart at an early hour, Madame Dacier proposed that they should retire. As they arose to do so, another startling rap on the door was heard, and M. Dacier himself went to see who demanded admittance at so late an hour.

A man, so muffled as effectually to disguise his person, handed him a letter, and immediately disappeared. On examination, it was found to be addressed to Lefevre, and in it he found these words:

"M. LEFEVRE,—Though I am not of much consequence at court, I yet have the means of finding out what goes on there, and I advise you to leave Paris before daylight. A *lettre de cachet* has already been issued against you, for violating the late ordinance forbidding strange Protestants to remain in the city; and if you are found here at dawn you will be thrown into the Bastile, when to be released, the priests and Madame de Maintenon alone can tell.

"Even one emotion of pity and justice on the part of the poor king they are already endeavoring to render nugatory, by depriving you of all chance to use your father's pardon in time to save him. Be warned in time, and save yourself from so untoward a fate."

There was no signature to this note, but it was easy to recognize the Duchess of Orleans as its writer; and Lefevre at once prepared to follow her counsel. The barriers of Paris were closed at this hour, but, by using a little *finesse*, he doubted not he should be able to pass out. His uniform, together with the package he had just received, bearing the royal seal upon it, would be a passport to him, by means of which he might journey in safety from one end of the kingdom to the other, so much was every thing respected that bore the impress of the sovereign's hand.

After returning many sincere thanks to Madame Dacier for the assistance she had rendered him, Gerauld took leave of her, and, accompanied by her husband, went to the stable

in which he had placed his horse. The people there had not yet retired, and his faithful steed was soon in readiness to resume his journeyings with the master he had long served.

The stable-keeper expressed some surprise at his being wanted at so late an hour of the night; but a mysterious whisper from M. Dacier, that his friend was departing on secret business connected with the court, caused the man to look on him with deep respect, and expedite his departure as much as possible.

As Lefevre had anticipated, the sight of the king's seal operated like magic on the officer in charge of the gate, and he was permitted to pass into the open country at once. Thus far safe from the pursuit of his enemies, M. Dacier took leave of him at the barrier, and, bidding him God speed, returned to report to his wife his safe egress from the city.

CHAPTER XX.

WE must now return to the fortunes of Claude Chastain. Seized and hurried away to the loathsome dungeons of Nismes, he had been many weeks a prisoner, deprived of every thing that could render life endurable.

Chastain was placed in the same cell with a mendicant friar, whose conduct had outraged even the most lenient of all judges toward her own children—the Church of Rome; and he had been confined in prison, where his days were spent in blasphemy against every thing pure and holy. If any thing could have added to the sufferings of the prisoner, it was such companionship as this.

The fetid air of the confined prison, combined with the state of his mind, threw Chastain into a low fever, during which no mitigation of his condition was permitted; on the contrary, his sufferings were aggravated in every possible manner. As a faithless son of the Church, he was dealt with even more hardly than the other prisoners; and while parched with fever and consumed with thirst, not even water was allowed him, except in the small quantity which was placed beside him with his daily ration of dry bread.

The wild ravings of his wretched companion were inexpressibly tormenting to him; while his head was racked with pain, and every nerve in his body seemed indued with a power to inflict torture upon him. Added to these causes of bodily anguish, the priests came, day after day, to tempt him, by every means in their power, to retract his declaration of belief in the tenets of the Reformed Church.

If he would consent to re-enter the pale of Rome, rewards and aggrandizement were offered him; and threats of torture, and death by burning, held out as the alterna-

tives. But, even amidst his severest sufferings, the strength of his soul was not shaken. He rejected all their offers, and declared emphatically "that he preferred the Word of God before the traditions of men, and His true worship before that of a human being in the person of the Pope. That, according to St. Paul, there is no need of knowing any but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, and to acknowledge Him who sent Christ as the only true God; for on this belief it is that the Lord hath founded life eternal."

After this declaration had been many times repeated, Chastain was regarded as a recusant so utterly given over to blindness of heart that he was left to abide the consequences of his firmness. Several of his most zealous tormentors advocated the application of torture; but his reduced condition forbade that, since the chief inquisitors were desirous of making a public example of him, which might deter other Catholics from following in his footsteps.

His fever gradually left him, how or why he knew not, unless the natural strength of an unbroken constitution enabled him to triumph over the disease. At length the public mockery of a trial was granted the prisoners, before which their fate had been decided. To save appearances, a judicial form was gone through, over which D'Aguesseau presided, that ended in their being turned over to the secular power, to be dealt with according to their deserts. This was simply giving them over to the priests, to do as they pleased with. Then the real ordeal was to be endured.

This last trial was secret, of course; for the myrmidons of Rome would scarcely venture openly to arraign victims who would, in all probability, have the boldness to speak the truth concerning the tribunal that condemned them.

At a late hour of the night, ten Huguenots were conveyed in a cart to the Dominican Convent, in which a hall of judgment had been fitted up that was constantly in use. The two among these sufferers with whom we have to do were Claude Chastain and Loyal; although the histories of

the others were full of tragic interest, illustrating the horrors of the times in which it was their misfortune to live.

They were ushered into a circular room, lighted by lamps, shaded in such a manner as to afford a ghastly, bluish light, and the atmosphere seemed filled with the fumes of fetid vapor, such as is fabled to arise from the bottomless pit forever. On the walls were painted scenes from purgatory, and wretched beings were undergoing every species of torture the imagination of fiends could invent.

The weird lights which flickered over these terrible forms seemed at moments to induce them with motion; and the hapless prisoners, dragged from the darkness of their dungeons to behold them, with shattered nerves and weakened vision, might almost have believed themselves suddenly introduced into the Inferno itself.

Against the wall, on the side opposite the entrance, was the seat of the inquisitors. On a raised platform stood three commodious chairs, in front of which was a massive table, with a lamp suspended above it. These seats were now occupied by the abbot and two brothers of the order; they were robed in black, with cowls drawn over their faces, so as to conceal them completely, with the exception of the cold and cruel eyes which gleamed beneath them on the wretched captives brought there to receive condemnation.

Above their heads hung a picture of Thomas Aquinas, whose intolerant doctrines are held in extreme reverence by the most uncompromising portion of the believers in Rome. He was represented with a sun in his breast, from which beams of wisdom are supposed to radiate, and with a dove at his ear, symbolical of the Holy Spirit, whispering to him revelations from heaven. Beside him hung an immense crucifix, as emblematic of the story recorded of him, that this symbol was once miraculously endowed with speech, and addressed him in words applauding his doctrines, commencing thus: "Oh, Thomas! thou hast written well concerning me." His chief dogma, "Death to all heretics," renders him particularly acceptable to the inquisitors, who

find in his ingenious pages an apology for any severity the Church may see fit to practice.

The abbot occupied the central seat, and before him lay the *Libro Necro*, or Black Book, in which were placed the accusations against the prisoners. The book itself contained the method of conducting the process. It runs as follows:

"With respect to the examination and the duty of the examiners, either the prisoner confesses, and he is found guilty from his own confession; or he does not confess, and is equally guilty on the evidence of witnesses. If a prisoner confesses the whole of what he is accused, he is unquestionably guilty of the whole; but if he confesses only a part, he should be still regarded as guilty of the whole, as what he has confessed proves him capable of guilt as to other points of the accusation." "Bodily torture has ever been found the most salutary and efficient means of leading to spiritual repentance. Therefore the choice of the most befitting mode of torture is left to the judge of the Inquisition." "If, notwithstanding all the means employed, the unfortunate wretch still denies his guilt, he is to be considered as a victim of the devil, and as such deserves no compassion from the servants of God, nor the pity or indulgence of Holy Mother Church: he is a son of perdition. Let him perish, then, among the damned, and let his place be no longer found among the living."

Such was the merciless code by which thousands were judged.

Among the squalid and miserable group now collected to receive sentence from these ruthless judges were several women and two old men, one of sixty-five, and the other seventy years of age. They were so infirm as to be scarcely capable of sustaining themselves, yet they unflinchingly bore all that man could inflict upon them.

Eight out of the ten prisoners were speedily dealt with; they were condemned to be taken to Marseilles in chains, and from there embarked on ships destined for Canada, there to be sold into slavery to defray the expenses of their

voyage, provided they arrived safely at its termination; this last being always extremely doubtful, as the ships employed were usually unseaworthy, and in more instances than one had foundered almost in sight of the port from which they were sent.

The Huguenots received their sentence in silence, and were removed by two attendant brethren, who came in at the summons of a bell. There remained only Chastain and Laval. The former was pale and wasted from sickness and long confinement; but he was calm and self-reliant—firm in his resolution to remain true to the convictions that were in his heart. Laval looked like what his sufferings had made him, a gaunt and wretched madman, with but one clear idea in his mind, that the cause in which he so severely suffered was that of God himself. He was now in that condition which made him reckless of all they could henceforth inflict upon him; he wished to die and be at rest: he dared not take his own life, therefore he felt that it would be a mercy to him to receive death at the hands of the Inquisition. In this mood nothing was to be wrung from him: he sat with his large black eyes restlessly wandering from side to side, and a thrilling shudder sometimes convulsed his frame as his glance fell upon the demoniac figures pictured on the walls.

The questions of the inquisitors seemed to make no impression on him, until one of them loudly called him by his name and imperatively commanded him to answer. Thus aroused, he sullenly asked,

“What do you want of me? Is it not enough that you have destroyed my family, and will torture and burn me, without asking me to confess that I deserve such punishment? If it is guilt to worship God according to His revealed word; to believe that Christ is the only mediator between man and his Maker, and not the Virgin and the saints, as you teach, then I am guilty. Christ I believe to be the head of the Church, and not St. Peter; for He alone can be infallible. Destroy me for this, as you destroyed all

belonging to me, because my daughter sung a psalm from that Book of life which your tyranny has prohibited. I have said all I have to say, and now you may do your worst."

His head sunk upon his breast, and he relapsed into the vague, dreamy condition from which he had been momentarily aroused. The abbot rang his bell, and a brother appeared bearing a long robe and a conical cap, both painted with flames of fire.

"Arise, Jean Laval, and put on the condemned robe," was pronounced in a deep tone; but Laval did not seem to hear him, until the attendant monk touched him and repeated the command. He scornfully regarded the lugubrious-looking garment, and silently suffered his person to be covered with it. The cap was then placed upon his head, from which his long white hair, unshorn for many weeks, hung in tangled masses over his sallow and strongly marked features. His gleaming eyes fastened themselves upon the tall form of the abbot as he arose and pronounced his sentence:

"Jean Laval, for your contumacy exhibited here in the presence of the accredited ministers of our Holy Mother Church, and for speaking disrespectfully of the Virgin, and denying the spiritual supremacy of his holiness the Pope, you are to suffer the torture of the rack: finally, you are to expiate your abominable heresy by being burned at the stake; and thus may all the enemies of our blessed faith perish."

To this his two companions responded "Amen," and devoutly crossed themselves. After the abbot finished speaking, Laval stood a moment, as if still listening: he raised his hand, and his eyes seemed to look vaguely before him, as he slowly repeated,

"'Their idols are silver and gold, even the works of men's hands.' . . . 'They that make them are like unto them, and so are all that put their trust in them.' . . . 'Ye that fear the Lord, put your trust in the Lord; He is your helper and defender.'"

"Even so have I done from my youth upward; even so will I do to the end. Men of wrath and blood, you, and such as you, drive from this desecrated land the true spirit of God, and seek to substitute in its place the corruptions of Rome. Accomplish your mission; but the blood of the martyrs shall be avenged in that day when the Church you would elevate at the expense of every thing sacred is trampled under foot by the lawless mob your acts are helping to arm against the cause of humanity. The nation will be deluged in an ocean of blood, to which that which now flows will seem but an insignificant stream; and all this evil is accomplished, that you may thrust from the bosom of the land those whose purity reproaches your sin."

He offered his hand to Chastain, and solemnly said,

"Brother, we will meet again on that glorious day in which Christ will find us worthy to become martyrs to his holy cause."

Claude wrung his hand, and Laval was removed to the chamber of torture, into which we shall not enter. Such scenes have often been described, and our narrative deals with so much that is real and terrible, as to render it necessary to keep back many details which would only add a harrowing interest to our pages.

Chastain being then left alone, the abbot regarded him piercingly a few moments, and then said,

"My son, it is far from being our desire to sacrifice a scion of a true Catholic family like yours. Your parents died in the faith; how comes it, then, that you have departed from their teachings?"

Chastain calmly replied,

"Because I have had an opportunity to study that Bible from which your Church has removed one of the commandments, which instructs us that we shall not make unto ourselves any graven image, or bow down to it. You can not deny that this is daily done in your churches."

"And are you so blind of heart that you can not spiritually discern the true meaning of the images used by us?"

"I do not, nor do you ; for in that case it would not have been found necessary to remove from the Decalogue the commandment to which I have referred."

The abbot consulted a paper taken from the Black Book : "You are accused, Claude Chastain, of having spoken disrespectfully of the ritual of the Church, and to have said that a dead religion was well expressed in the language of a people long since passed away from among the nations of the earth."

"Who are my accusers?" asked Chastain. "It is usual to confront them with the accused."

"It is the duty of every man to report heretical opinions to the priests ; and the Church holds in her own hands the power to use that information without producing the person who furnishes it. Answer to the charges brought, without making such futile objections."

"Since I am aware that my fate is already determined on, I will freely do so," replied the prisoner, with calm dignity. "I have said that the prayers which are hurried over by a priest, in words incomprehensible to the people for whose benefit they are put up, can have no influence in preserving a vital spirit of piety. The sermon is addressed to men by a mortal like themselves, giving his interpretation of the truths of Scripture ; but the prayers are the aspirations of the soul, addressed to Deity by the heart of the worshiper, and form his only medium of communication with Him. Therefore should they, in public worship, be sufficiently intelligible to the most ignorant to enable his heart to rise with them to the throne of grace."

"And to you, is there nothing grand or solemn in the idea that all the congregations of the Church address the Deity in the same tongue ; thus preserving intact the pure sense of the primitive Church?"

"Nothing, when it is weighed against the fact that the majority of the hearers do not comprehend it, and therefore are unmoved by it."

The second clause of the accusation was then read.

"You are charged with having spoken contemptuously of confession, and of the infallibility of our head, the Pope."

"Christ said, '*I am the way and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me.*' Such are the words of the Saviour himself; authorized by them, I deny the spiritual supremacy of the Pope."

"You have not replied to the first charge. Is it not also said, '*Confess your sins one to another?*'"

"It is, but not as you explain it. If a man has done evil to his brother, then let him confess that evil, that he may obtain forgiveness from him. In like manner, when we sin against the commands of God, let us go to him, as Christ has taught us—as all the Prophets and Apostles have done, and pray to him for forgiveness; not to the venal priest, who sells absolution for a sin he has no more power to remit than I have to call down fire from heaven to consume those who make a traffic of the mercy of the most high God."

The voice of the abbot trembled with anger as he preferred the next charge:

"You have also denied all faith in the real presence of Christ in the eucharist."

"If by the real presence you mean the blood, body, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ, I must deny it. The mere repetition of a form of words over bread made by human hands can never transmute it into the body of the Saviour. He merely spoke in a figurative sense, when he said, '*This is my body,*' for unto himself alone belonged the power of performing miracles, and it is contrary to the express word of God to suppose that the priest possesses that power. The natural body of Christ was offered in sacrifice only once; and, if St. Paul speaks truth, that sufficed for our salvation. In this sacrament we simply join ourselves by faith to Him who died that we might live."

Here the abbot crushed the paper from which he had hitherto read, and abruptly said,

"Are you determined to lose yourself, body and soul,

Claude Chastain? Has life no charms for you, that you thus recklessly cast it from you?"

An expression of exquisite pain swept over the pale features of the prisoner, and he said,

"Life would indeed be welcome, if it could be preserved without the sacrifice of that which is of more worth. It is from no reckless disregard of its value that I have spoken, but from the convictions of conscience, which I dare no longer stifle."

"Pause—reflect on what you are doing. That which has the sanction of so many good and pious men to sustain it, must be holy. The clemency of the Church will gladly be extended to you if you will renounce these mistaken views. Think what it is to set up your youthful and immature judgment against so venerable an institution, in which the learning of ages has been preserved—to which God has given such wide-spread sway. What is your conscience, that it shall set itself up in opposition to the holy of holies? Beware, lest the fate of the sacrilegious Israelites become yours."

"It can be no sacrilege to bring the pretensions of the Church to the test of truth. My own conscience, in that, is the only standard with which God has furnished me; and I must use it as His spirit dictates."

"And you give your body over to the tortures of fire, sooner than renounce these base heresies? It is not right, my son. Listen to the pleadings of your own heart; for if you will return to the faith of your fathers, I offer you the fulfillment of its dearest wishes. Your history is known to me, and I promise you happiness with her you love, and prosperous fortunes in the future."

A vivid streak of crimson shot over the cheek of the prisoner, and for a moment his heart throbbed with emotion at the image conjured up before him; yet he too well knew the lures held out to the condemned to induce them to conform, and he nerved himself anew for resistance. He only made a gesture of refusal, and, sinking his head between his hands, sat motionless awaiting his sentence.

The abbot whispered a few words to one of his companions, and he noiselessly glided over the floor and left the room. In a few moments he returned, ushering in a strange group to be admitted to the hall of condemnation.

The Sieur de Montour and his daughter supported between them the form of Irene, wearing upon her changed features an expression of resigned suffering that was extremely touching. She uttered a slight cry as she beheld Chastain, and he started forward at the sound of her voice. With sudden strength that did not seem to be in her wasted frame, she tore herself from the supporting arms of her relatives, and with one bound lay upon the breast of the prisoner, sobbing as if her heart would break, while he murmured words over her that at any other crisis would have filled her heart with gladness.

"Mine own—my precious, darling wife, God is good to me, indeed, in thus permitting me to hold you to my heart once more."

The Sieur de Montour approached them, and would have taken her from his arms; but Chastain clasped her form only the more firmly, and said,

"She is mine—mine in the sight of Heaven, for the nuptial benediction has been pronounced over us by a holy man of God. In this hour the acknowledgment of the tie can not affect our sad destiny either for good or for evil."

"Irene, is this true?" asked her uncle. "Have you withheld this knowledge from me during all this time, even when I pressed another union on you?"

"It is true, uncle. I am his wife, wedded to him in heart, in love, and truth; and all I ask is that I may go with him to his dungeon, even to the stake, if such is to be his fate."

Though little anticipating such an avowal as this, Irene had been brought there at the instigation of the abbot, that the two known to be lovers might be mutually tempted to relinquish their faith under circumstances of such trial as must shake the soul to its very centre. Resolute to over-

come her resistance to his will, the *Sieur de Montour* had consented that she should undergo this severe ordeal, and *Irene* was taken from her room while scarcely convalescent, and brought thither, that the sight of her might induce the firmness of *Chastain* to falter. But even if such were the result, it was by no means his intention to permit the hand of his niece to be the reward of his conformity, though, with the true spirit of the Jesuit, it was to be held out as the temptation.

He haughtily asked,

"When and by whom was this marriage celebrated?"

"By *M. Lecroix*, the pastor of the desert, on the night we last met beneath my father's roof," replied *Irene*, raising her pale face from the breast of *Chastain*.

"Then it is not recognized as valid by the Church, and you are not the lawful wife of him to whom you so shamefully cling."

He would again have made an effort to take her from him, but *Claude* refused to permit him to do so. He said,

"Our union was sanctioned by the only Church we acknowledge as possessing the spirit of Christ. *Irene* was given to me by her father; wherefore, then, shall you seek to snatch her from me for the few brief hours I may yet live?"

"Because I have the power to do so, and it is not my will that my niece shall be regarded as your wife," replied *De Montour*, imperiously.

"Yet God himself has said, 'Those whom I have joined together, let no man put asunder.' The tie that links us must soon be severed by the cruel hands into whose power I have fallen; why, then, deny to me the brief solace its acknowledgment may afford me?"

"Oh! *Claude*—my own *Claude*, must you, indeed, die?" moaned the unhappy girl. "Must your young life, your noble heart, be destroyed at the bidding of these cruel men?"

The abbot caught the meaning of her words, and he replied,

"Not if you will both listen to the voice of God and rea-

son, my daughter. I have already given M. Chastain sufficient proof that we are more desirous of saving his soul than of making him a martyr to the heretical opinions he has unhappily imbibed; but he obstinately refuses to avail himself of the avenue of escape opened to him. I now renew the offers recently made to him, and your presence here must give him the assurance of my power to fulfill them."

Irene raised herself from Chastain's supporting arm, and sat down on the rude bench from which he had risen. The impulse that moved her she scarcely comprehended herself; it was the sudden consciousness that the subtle policy of the priests was to make her presence a snare to her unhappy lover; and, despairingly as she desired to save him, she yet shrank from becoming herself a temptation to swerve from the course his manly soul had avowed to be the only true one.

There are martyrs of the heart, as of the stake, and this pale, fragile being was of them. She felt that Chastain must answer from the dictates of his own conscience alone; and she withdrew from his embrace, that he should not find his resolution melt before the irrepressible emotion that shook her frame almost to dissolution. For an instant Chastain's glance dwelt mournfully upon her face, then he aroused himself to the duty before him. He raised his form to its full height, threw back his hair from his brow, and, fixing his piercing eyes upon the abbot, said,

"Tell me, Father in the Church as you profess to be, should I be a true man, or a worthy son of Rome, if I yield to my love for yonder fair woman, what I have refused to your denunciations and cajoleries?"

"Son, it is a simple matter; acknowledge the authority of the Church; conform outwardly, and you are saved both temporally and spiritually. The power of God is such, that when so much is gained, He will complete the rest, by bringing you back, in spirit and in truth, to the communion you have unhappily forsaken. Renounce heresy, and par-

don is yours—restoration to the position you lately occupied ; and the object of your affections shall be the crowning reward.”

Chastain glanced sadly toward the drooping form of Irene, and is it wonderful that for a moment his strength faltered ? Why should he not do as thousands had done, and were daily doing ? conform outwardly until an opportunity for escape offered ; and thus secure his own safety, and the rescue of Irene from the power of her uncle ? It was a great and subtle temptation of the evil one ; but he struggled manfully against it. He asked himself, “ Does the cause of good really demand this sacrifice of me ? Is it not my first duty to protect my wedded wife, and save her from farther suffering ? Can I not worship God as truly if called a Papist as a Protestant ? I know there are many good and noble people among them ; why, then, can I not be among those who hold themselves free from the abominations of the system, and worship God acceptably ? ”

For a few brief moments he was bewildered by these subtle suggestions of the tempter ; then the immutable truth arose before him, and his soul responded to it :

“ No ; I dare not ; for light has entered my soul, and I regard the whole Popish fabric as rotten at the core, and capable of producing no fruit worthy of acceptance from the most high God. Through His mercy, those who really believe in it, and are humble followers of such light as they have, will be saved ; but in me it would be acting a lie before Him who can read my motives, and judge me accordingly.”

He resolutely turned his eyes from Irene, and firmly answered,

“ Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing ? I refuse your offers, and may Heaven give me strength to abide, without shrinking, by my decision.”

“ Then be your fate on your own head,” replied the abbot, sternly. He then slowly read the sentence condemning him to be burned upon the public square of the

city on the occasion of the next great festival in the Church.

Chastain heard it with firmness, though his heart throbbed with anguish for her who was thus cruelly compelled to hear the terrible ordeal to which he was condemned. Bertha had drawn near to her cousin, and now sat beside her sustaining her half-fainting form. As the voice of the monk ceased, Irene raised herself with difficulty, and, stretching out her arms toward Chastain, said, with emotion,

"God has not forsaken you, oh my love! It is He who gives you this sublime spirit of resistance to the evil voice of the tempter. Thanks be to Heaven, you have not fallen into the snare prepared for you. Our parting will not be for long, Claude; for I feel within my heart the assurance that I shall soon follow you to that better land 'where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' The weary! Oh! how expressive, how consoling this assurance is to one like me, bereft of all that made life valuable."

Chastain sat down beside her, and gently drew her head upon his breast. Even her cold-hearted relatives could not at that moment interpose; there was something sacred in the position these two held toward each other, that inspired respect even in their ruthless judges.

Claude murmured,

"You do not, then, blame me, my precious one, that even for your dear sake I could not deny my convictions of truth and right?"

"I honor, I reverence you for it. I feel as if I could gladly die to save you, Claude; but I can not bear that, for my poor sake, you shall do aught which may injure the cause of Christ, and thereby peril your own soul. These cruel men have power to kill the body, but the spirit must appear unstained before its Maker."

During this brief interchange of feeling the abbot approached the Sieur de Montour, and they spoke earnestly together. The priest then drew near Irene, and addressed her in his most persuasive tones:

"Daughter, does not your flesh shrink and quiver at the thought that he who now clasps you to his breast must have his strong sinews crisped, his beating heart suffocated by the flames that will consume him? And will you refuse to save him from the fiery ordeal?"

Irene regarded him with a bewildered air. She asked:

"Can I, indeed, save him? How? By what means?"

"By obeying the wishes of your uncle. Renounce the heresies in which you have been educated; admit the unlawfulness of the ceremony which made you the wife of Claude Chastain; accept the husband M. de Montour has provided for you, and the punishment of this man shall be commuted to transportation to Canada."

Chastain started, and a brief gleam of crimson glowed on his pallid cheeks, as he exclaimed,

"The tempter has ready a bribe for both husband and wife. Irene, the most cruel of deaths is more preferable to me than to be thus saved. I reject the terms for you; I will not accept the boon of life thus dearly purchased."

"Let her answer for herself," interposed the priest. "Daughter, renounce your heresy at the command of Heaven, and thus save the reckless man who has neither mercy for himself nor for you."

The heart of Irene almost ceased to beat, and for a moment she felt as if dying. Chastain bent over her and whispered a few words in her ear; they inspired her with new courage, and she spoke in an unfaltering voice,

"The faith of my fathers is mine, and I abide by it to the last. The goodness of God may yet rescue us from your power. In Him I trust; and if he aids us not to escape the evil snares which encompass us, it is because our work on earth is accomplished, and the reward of those that remain faithful to the end prepared for us in heaven."

"Can fanaticism go beyond this?" exclaimed her uncle, bitterly. "Irene, I give you over to the foolishness of your own heart and its fitting punishment. Holy father, take charge of her fate; place her with those who will deal with

her more firmly than I have done, and break her stubborn will. When she finds a convent for life, or the hand of an honorable man, the only alternative, she will understand that it is best to yield to my wishes."

"I accept the trust," replied the priest. "And now it seems to me that nothing more can be gained by prolonging this scene."

Again the bell was sounded, and the attendants came in with garments similar to those with which they had previously clothed Laval. Chastain arose, and, putting them aside, held Irene clasped firmly to his bursting heart. Their eyes were riveted on each other in one long, mournful gaze, and then their lips met.

Silently he placed her in the arms of her uncle, and motioned him to remove her before the hideous robes were placed upon him. M. de Montour bore out the senseless form of his niece, followed by Bertha, who had watched the progress of this scene with a feeling of deep solicitude; and so bitterly was she disappointed in its result, that she scarcely felt such sympathy for her cousin which her condition demanded.

Irene lay motionless so long, that they at length became alarmed lest she should never recover. Though the presence of females is forbidden in every monastery, the authority of the abbot on this occasion authorized it; for he was all-powerful in his own domicile. With impunity he evaded any law of the Church, for he enjoyed a plenary indulgence from the Pope, in consideration of the commanding position his subtle and powerful intellect gave him among his own order, and the unscrupulous services he rendered to that iniquitous tyranny he assisted to sustain.

The party from the chateau was conducted into a small chamber opening upon the spacious grounds, and there Bertha made many efforts to restore her cousin before she gave any sign of returning consciousness. At length a heavy sigh issued from her lips, and she partly unclosed her eyes; but when she comprehended where she was, and who were her

companions, she again seemed to relapse into partial insensibility. Bertha leaned over her, and said,

"Irene, listen to me. You suffer terribly. It is not yet too late. Speak now, and the life of Chastain shall be saved. Oh! my dear girl, would God afflict you so sorely if it were not to turn you to the right path?"

Irene shuddered. She faintly murmured,

"'Whom He loveth He chasteneth.' Bertha, I feel that I am in his hands, and I submit to whatever trials he may send me. Pray, let me rest—I am *so* weary."

Bertha exchanged a sorrowful glance with her father.

"She will not be moved," he frigidly said. "The discipline of the convent may bring her to a proper appreciation of all I would have done for her had she acted differently."

His daughter sighed; and presently the abbot came in, freed from the black disguise he had lately worn. His carriage was already at the door to remove Mademoiselle Lefevre to the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy. Irene was in no condition to remonstrate, even if words would have had any weight with those who wielded absolute power over her fate.

She was unable to walk, and the Sieur de Montour carried her in his arms and placed her in the vehicle. Bertha kissed her, and pressed her cold hands an instant in her own: then she was driven away to her new prison.

CHAPTER XXI.

DAY had dawned when they set out for the convent. The motion of the carriage somewhat revived the unhappy Irene, and she became aware that the abbot was seated beside her. He felt that within the past hour she had endured as severe mental torture as it was well to inflict even upon a heretic, and he judiciously refrained from speaking until Irene herself addressed him in a feeble and broken tone:

"Reverend father, whither are you taking me?"

"To the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy, where you will find sympathy and kindness that your recent companions knew not how to bestow. You will soon learn that all is not evil among us; that deeds of kindness and mercy are as common among Catholics as with those you have been taught to consider the only good ones of the earth."

"Ah!" sighed Irene, "if they are really good, why do they deny its first and greatest attribute, mercy? My heart is crushed by the iron despotism into whose power I have fallen."

"My daughter, you have only seen the darker and sterner side of Catholicism. There are duties which her faithful ministers must perform, even at the expense of much suffering to those who, like yourself, have known only error. But there are also beauties in the system, which will soon be developed to you through the agency of one who was herself but a short time since a wanderer in the darkness of doubt. Fear nothing from our severity, daughter; your uncle has sufficiently tried that: the lay members of the Church often fall into that error. But we, her trained soldiers, know better; we understand that the religion of Christ should be full of loving kindness toward those who are willing to embrace it. It is only to the obstinately erring, who are fatal-

ly periling their own eternal welfare, that the loving and tender mother wears a severe aspect."

Irene listened with wandering faculties. Of late she had suffered so much, both mentally and physically, that all power of farther endurance seemed utterly to fail. The heart so cruelly rent with anguish grew languid in its motion; passing objects glimmered and faded before her vision, and she reclined motionless in the corner of the carriage, with but one distinct thought in her overtaken mind—that Chastain was condemned to a painful death, and on earth they might never meet again.

When they reached the convent, Irene was taken into the apartment of the superior, where wine, with which a strong opiate was mingled, was given her. In her exhausted condition, it soon threw her into a deep sleep, during which she was removed to a light and cheerful-looking chamber, adjoining that of the new novice; for it was the purpose of the abbot to place her at once under the gentle influence of her he had so completely won over to their cause.

As one who had herself doubted and been convinced, Eugenia could speak more persuasively to her friend than any other; and the gentleness which had proved so successful in one case might be equally so in the present one.

The abbot was aware that of late years M. Lefevre and the father of Eugenia had been firm friends; and the younger members of the two families had been thrown much together. In this season of suffering and desolation, Irene would feel grateful for the kindness which permitted one she loved to be near her; to sympathize with and console her, in her heart-crushing grief.

When the superior saw that her new charge was sleeping calmly, she rejoined the abbot, who waited to have an interview with her. She immediately asked him,

"Do you not consider it a risk to place our new proselyte near the daughter of so stiff a heretic as M. Lefevre? How can we foresee what influence they may mutually exert over each other?"

"Do you consider Mademoiselle Lefevre a fair match for me, with all my subtle powers of convincing and bending others to my will? Oh! no; I have no fears. Mademoiselle Altenberg is entirely under my influence; so much so, that I believe if I told her the millennium would commence to-morrow, she would give it implicit credence."

"I know," replied the lady, sarcastically, "that you have gained over her a power you never before cared to exercise over any woman. To what purpose you have striven for it, I am at a loss to imagine, unless her pretty face has at last enslaved you. If so, that would be a curious heart-history, and one worth hearing. You, a man of mature years, hitherto indifferent to all the feminine race, suddenly ensnared by a young girl, who thinks only of obeying the will of God in dedicating herself to Heaven. What have you to hope from such a romantic attachment?"

The priest listened with curling and contemptuous lip to words he was aware were intended to annoy him. He quietly said,

"If I dare every thing to gain it, I look for a return to my affections. I never yet have been baffled in any thing in which my heart was deeply interested, neither will I be in this."

His companion regarded him with surprise. She said,

"You can not be in earnest, Antoine? Why, I am in doubt as to how she will receive the knowledge of the actual freedom of the life we lead, when the time comes to initiate her into it. I am afraid she will be shocked, and ready to run away from us at all risks, because we do not spend our days in prayers and penances."

"Happily it will then be too late," he coolly replied. "You must underrate my tact very much if you think my advances will fill her with horror. No—I have calculated every step, and master of her heart I will become before I breathe a word of love. I am Jesuit enough to silence every scruple but one, and that I have provided against. Much liberty, you are aware, is allowed to our order; and

his holiness the Pope has power to grant a dispensation enabling those of high rank in the Church to marry clandestinely. We all know that many of the cardinals at Rome are thus married, and without any violation of conscience; for the law which prohibits it is an arbitrary one, unknown among the followers of the faith until the thirteenth century. As a reward for the services I have rendered here, in bringing back heretics to the true fold, I am promised a cardinal's hat, and a dispensation of this kind. Now, what think you of my craft?"

"That it merits success, for it is perfect. Still, I doubt if success is to be won with the girl herself. I believe her to be sincere in her relinquishment of the world; and so high an opinion of your sanctity has she conceived, that a word which is calculated to show her that you are of the 'earth, earthy,' will tear the veil from her eyes, and she will fly from you with horror. Eugenia seems born for a devotee, and I assure you she is no more fitted for our life of self-indulgence than I am to become what she really is."

"It is that heavenly purity and simplicity that attracts me so strongly toward her," exclaimed the priest, enthusiastically. "It is that which has enslaved me!"

"Yet you would taint it! Nay, absolutely destroy it, Antoine."

"No, no—not so. I now believe that there is a love implanted in our nature as noble as any impulse God has given us, and I feel that our Church has erred in commanding that it shall be stifled. It was not so in the early history of the primitive Church; for St. Paul himself says, 'Let a bishop be the husband of one wife.' As such, I woo this young girl to my heart; and my subtlety must be at fault if I can not reconcile her to her fate. I tell you this, madame, because I need your aid; and we have heretofore been of such mutual service to each other, that I hardly fancy our interests can become divided now."

"Our *interests* are rather opposed in this matter," she coldly rejoined. "What disposition will be made of the for-

tune of Mademoiselle Altenberg? I know it is in your power to do pretty much as you please with it; but I hope you will be generous enough to bestow a fair portion of it on the house in which her vows are to be taken."

The abbot haughtily replied,

"Did you ever know me to defraud the Church, madame? Half the money shall come to your house; the remainder I shall retain the control of, to repay me for my trouble in regaining it. I have consulted justice in this arrangement, and my conscience is satisfied."

"Conscience!" repeated the superior, with bitter scorn. "Does such a thing exist in the Romish Church? Are not all her efforts systematically directed toward crushing such a monitor, where it is suspected to exist? Do not speak to *me* of conscience, Antoine, for neither you nor I are governed by any thing but expediency."

"Such is the policy of the world," he coldly replied; "and a great hierarchy, like ours, must be governed by the same means found successful with the different nations of the earth. Since you object to it, let the word conscience be expunged from our vocabulary. I only used it as a matter of habit. You understand that an equitable division of the spoils shall be made, and that is quite sufficient."

"Quite, and now let us proceed to other matters." •

After a conversation of considerable length, the abbot said,

"I wish to see our fair novice, that I may give her such instructions as are necessary concerning her new companion."

With a sarcastic smile the superior arose and summoned Eugenia to their presence. In a few moments the graceful figure of Mademoiselle Altenberg darkened the doorway. She now wore the flowing black robe of the order, but her head was as yet undisfigured by the cap. Her own glittering tresses were wound around it, and over them flowed the white veil in long folds falling nearly to her feet.

This gossamer drapery formed a fitting frame-work for

the spiritual face that looked forth from it, fair and colorless as marble. Exquisitely delicate and feminine as Eugenia ever had been, the new phase her character had of late assumed, had stamped something still more elevated and refined upon her features. Even the abbot felt almost rebuked by this visible presence of purity which threw its halo around her; and as she advanced toward him, holding in her hand a book of devotion which she had been studying, he felt as if his touch would be almost sacrilege upon the fair fingers that held the manual.

This feeling was but momentary, however; he took the book, and clasping the little hand with more unction than was necessary, even to his supposed fatherly feeling, led her to a seat. One of the chief elements in Eugenia's character was lack of suspicion; and although the manner of her father confessor seemed to her unnecessarily caressing, in the simplicity of her own nature she attributed it to his interest in her everlasting welfare. That a man so much her senior, and a reverend father in the Church, regarded her with other feelings than those of saintly benevolence, never entered her guileless mind. She admired and revered him as a person of superior intellect and great sanctity; she, therefore, shrank not from the strange influence she felt he had established over her. Its tendency could only be for her good; therefore she willingly surrendered to him the guidance of her thoughts and feelings.

"Daughter," said the priest, gently, "your fair face bears testimony to your happiness under the protection of our good lady superior. Its sweet placidity seems like a visible blessing to all who look upon you."

"My soul does enjoy a peace that must be a foretaste of that which is promised us in our Father's kingdom," she replied; "and the good mother has indeed proved one to me."

Her grateful glance toward the superior was rewarded by that lady stooping forward and pressing her lips lightly upon the smooth brow of the young girl; then, with a meaning glance toward her kinsman, she left the room. The

priest drew his chair opposite to the one occupied by Eugenia, and fixed his penetrating glance upon her: their eyes met, and for a moment it seemed impossible to her to withdraw hers from the magnetic attraction of his strangely luminous orbs. He half smiled at the effect he could so easily produce, and himself removed the influence by looking away from her. A slight tremor passed over her frame, like the faint breath of the evening breeze that just stirs the foliage and then dies away; and the young girl felt shame at the remembrance of how boldly she had looked into the reverend father's eyes. A deep blush dyed her pale cheeks, but soon faded away when she saw that he no longer looked toward her. He commenced in his skillfully modulated voice,

"Daughter, have my teachings been instrumental in bringing you to a true knowledge of that which is necessary to the eternal well-being of your soul?"

"I truly believe they have, holy father; and I thank you with all my heart for your efforts to lead me into the way of life."

"Then, my child, I ask you, in your turn, to impart to another that bread of life which you have found so acceptable."

"Assuredly, father. Do you wish me to instruct in the school? I have desired to do so, that I may become useful to the poor little children assembled there; and also to assist in lightening the labors of the humbler sisters, who have the exclusive care of them; but the superior deferred granting my request."

"That is not my meaning, daughter. The nuns in charge of the children have been trained to their employment, and understand it better than those reared in a different sphere. The Church of Rome believes in the fitness of its agents, and to each one his appropriate duty is assigned."

"Yet women seem fitted by nature to train the young mind," she replied, with a smile he thought irresistible. He replied,

"True; and the day may come, after your profession is

made, when you may follow the bent of your own inclinations, if it still leads you to aid in instructing the children. At present, I prefer that your mind shall remain free from such cares, that it may have leisure to study and comprehend the vast and glorious scheme of Christian excellence developed to you in the works I have placed in your hands. Since the Church has become the living light that guides your steps, I do not fear to place in your charge a young heretic, who has just been received within these walls. I warn you that she is in darkness of the worst kind; for it is that spiritual blindness which leads her to believe that she is in the true path that leads to heaven."

"I will do my best, holy father; and I trust the efforts of the faithful may prevail in bringing her over to the truth."

"I doubt it not, daughter; especially as this young girl is in the deepest affliction of mind, besides suffering from great weakness of body. She requires tender dealing; therefore have I placed her under your care. Besides, I thought to afford you a pleasure also; for this young girl was once a friend of your own."

Eugenia's eyes brightened; her heart beat quickly, in spite of the calmness she had of late acquired.

"Who is it?" she asked, in a low voice.

"It is the niece of the *Sieur de Montour*, who has vainly tried to bring her over to his views. Our measures will be more judiciously taken, and will, therefore, be more likely to succeed. There is no wish to induce her to assume the veil, as that would defeat her uncle's views for her. Our only aim is to make her a good Catholic."

"Do you speak of *Mademoiselle Lefevre*? I know of no other niece the *Sieur de Montour* has. Yet how can she have fallen into the hands of her uncle?" And Eugenia pressed her hand upon that heart she had believed severed from all earthly interests, to quell its wild throbbing at this announcement that her best-loved friend was near her under such painful circumstances of constraint. The abbot regarded her with intense scrutiny as he replied,

"The seclusion in which you live has prevented you from hearing what passes in the world without. The father of Mademoiselle Lefevre is a fugitive, after destroying his chateau to prevent it from being longer occupied by the troops of the king. The Sieur de Montour took the daughter under his protection, and has made many efforts to proselyte her; but she was firm against such measures as he used, and he has sent her to us. Persuade her, as you well know how to do, sweet Eugenia, and she must be won."

The novice started, and looked hastily up. That seemed a strange phrase for a holy father in the Church to use to her, and sounded discordantly to the spirit tuned to holy harmonies. He read the effect of his momentary forgetfulness, and added, in his most saintly manner,

"My good daughter, in your hands I leave the spiritual welfare of this poor, misguided one, with the assurance, in my own mind, that if human agency can restore her to the right, yours will carry with it the blessing of Heaven. Let us conclude our interview, as usual, by confession."

Reassured, and ashamed of her momentary doubt, Eugenia knelt humbly before him, and, casting her eyes in penitence upon the floor, commenced laying bare the impulses and emotions of her own heart. Destitute of incident as her daily life was, there was nothing else to be revealed; and thus the priest held in his hand the clew to every impulse of that inner life he was so anxious to influence.

The desire to try one more experiment in his magnetic art seized upon him with such power, as he looked down on the bowed face, that it would not be denied. He raised his hand, and suffered it slowly to descend upon her forehead, as in an attitude of benediction. She seemed to shrink slightly, and he felt the quickened motion of the veins that thrilled beneath his touch. Gradually her words came more slowly, and with imperfect utterance. His eagle glance was fixed upon the drooping lids, which fell heavier and heavier over the closing eyes, and her oppressed breathing showed that she had passed into that strange state of somnambu-

lism which one human being often has the power of producing in another.

This was the triumph long sought. Assured of this power over her, she could never escape from him, struggle as she might; and his heart beat with a wild exultation never before felt amidst all the excitements of his career.

He lifted her from the floor, and placed her in a chair with a high carved back that supported her head. He gazed upon her inanimate features with that expression of deep interest he dared not permit her to behold. He knelt before her, and pressed her hands to his lips and heart with passionate fervor. Then the temptation to snatch one kiss from her half-parted lips, before he restored her to her usual condition, seemed irresistible: he arose, and bent over her for that purpose; but the tremulous motion of her eyelids warned him that consciousness was returning.

At the same instant a step outside the door was heard, and as the superior entered, Eugenia sat up perfectly freed from the incomprehensible trance into which she had been thrown. She looked bewildered, and, pressing her hand upon her brow, asked,

"How came I here? A moment since I was kneeling at confession, and now I find myself sitting here."

"Daughter," replied the priest, gravely, "a holy trance came over you while you spoke to me. An angel, no doubt, was floating above your head, for I thought I beheld the glory reflected from his pinions glimmering around you. Doubtless you are one set apart for a peculiar and a high destiny. Follow in the path you have entered on, and the Virgin will give her choicest blessings to the most highly favored of her votaries."

Eugenia bowed reverently, and the abbot, with a gesture of benediction, dismissed her. She walked from the room as one still in a dream, and as the door closed on her retiring form the superior said,

"Antoine, such deception toward that poor credulous child almost awakens a conscience even in me. It is

shameful—it is fiend-like, to act thus toward one who confides so implicitly in you. I know very well that you have been practicing on her that black art learned from the Italian physician; and she is not the first poor victim who has been led to believe herself inspired of Heaven, when the evil of the Inferno itself was the influence at work."

"Let not your indignation boil over for so simple a provocation, madame," replied the priest, with assumed dignity. "I, at least, have never before used this art against one of your sex. Now it will be an efficient weapon in my hands, and I was simply testing the extent of my power. I am satisfied that I can wield it at my own will, and for the present I seek no more."

He bowed coldly, and withdrew.

In the mean time Eugenia sought her own apartment, to reflect in solitude on the strange experience of the last hour. She dared not doubt the words of her confessor; but for the first time there was a strange emotion of repulsion toward him, for which she could not account. She was aroused to the consciousness that, while present with her, his spirit ruled hers in some unfathomable manner; but he was as yet far from becoming absolute master, for, so soon as the influence was removed, her own individuality resumed its sway; an intuitive consciousness that evil had been present with her entered her soul, and she wept bitterly at this first faint glimmer of the truth. Perfect trust was the predominating trait in her character, and it had been so delightful to believe that the people by whom she was now surrounded were free from the ordinary frailties of earth; that they walked before God with sincere hearts and irreproachable lives.

While she thus sat absorbed in painful emotion, Sister Angela came in, and manifested deep sympathy for the condition in which she found her. Her artful questions soon drew from the young novice all that was passing in her mind, and she hastened to reassure her, and soothe her agitated spirits. A devout believer in miracles herself, the

nun deemed it sacrilege to mistrust the assertion of the abbot; and she assured Eugenia that without doubt she was a chosen vessel of grace, and the Holy Virgin had given her this manifestation of peculiar love to induce her to become one of the sisterhood at as early a day as possible; thus availing herself of this opportunity to hurry forward Mademoiselle Altenberg's profession, in obedience to the commands of the abbot, who had promised an extension of privileges to the convent on that occasion.

Eugenia was very young, and easily influenced; so she wiped her tears away, and suffered her thoughts to revert to their late channel. She remembered the commission given her by the priest, and asked,

"Where shall I find Mademoiselle Lefevre? The holy father has granted me permission to be with her, and attend to her in her illness."

Sister Angela opened the door communicating with the next apartment, and said,

"You will find her here; but she sleeps heavily, from the opiate it was necessary to give her. The poor child looked nearly deranged by grief when they brought her here this morning."

Eugenia drew near the bed, and looked down on the worn and pallid face of her friend. It was greatly changed since she had last beheld it; and the impress of bitter anguish, still upon the sleeping features, struck her as expressing the most intense grief she had ever beheld. This was not strange, for the last vision that flitted before the tortured mind of the hapless girl was that of him she loved wrapped in a winding-sheet of flame.

Eugenia felt thankful that to her had been delegated the privilege of consoling her; and after the nun left her, she sat quietly beside the couch, recalling the past, and dreaming over scenes she had lately thought could never again arouse more than a passing interest in her memory. The image of Gerauld arose before her, and her conscience smote her for her late letter to him, coming, as it must have done,

as another blow, so soon after the ruin and dispersion of his family became known to him. She grieved for the disappointment of one who had loved her well, but she still thought her course had been best for her own individual happiness and well-being in the future.

Feeling that such meditations were profitless, and, in her position, might be sinful, she again had recourse to her book. It was one compiled expressly for the use of persons who had been educated where the simple and pure truths of religion had gained an influence over them, and in it there was to be found little of the Romish superstition, or double-dealing with which papists have always been charged. There was sophism in abundance, but disguised in such a form as to elude any but a practiced mind, which had been trained to detect every subtlety and refute it.

Eugenia had been instructed to pray for faith to believe in this work, that it might have its perfect influence on her mind; and she now studied it devoutly, hoping that her wandering thoughts and faintly-aroused fears would be set at rest by its teachings. The hours passed slowly away: she was summoned to refecton, and left Irene still heavily sleeping. The superior detained her, after the meal was over, to practice some music with her; and once within her apartment, she kept her there until the evening was partly spent.

With brightened spirits the young novice returned to her friend. She found Irene just arousing herself from her heavy slumbers. At first she did not recognize Eugenia in the dress she wore. When she did, she clasped her hands and wept, with the sorrowful abandonment of a person who has lost all control over her emotions.

"My darling Irene," murmured Eugenia, "how deeply you must have suffered to reduce you to this! It breaks my heart to see you so afflicted."

When Irene could speak, she said,

"And our last meeting was so unlike this! Oh! Eugenia, I am like the dove sent forth from the ark that never returned to it."

"Here, at least, my dear girl, have you found an ark of refuge, where peace may again be yours," said the gentle voice of the consoler.

"Here? In the life of a nun! Never! I can die; but this living death would be intolerable to me. Eugenia, how can you wear that dress, when you— Oh! my poor brother, doomed, like your unhappy sister, to wretchedness," and she covered her face with her hands, and seemed struggling to acquire control over herself.

Much disturbed by this reproach, Eugenia sat down beside her, and, after reflecting a moment, replied,

"Do not wrong me, Irene, and lose the confidence in me you once had. In embracing the destiny for which I am now preparing myself, I have been actuated only by the purest motives. Gerauld understands them, for I have been permitted to write to him and explain my feelings."

"He knows, then, into what a fatal snare you have fallen? Poor Gerauld! the future evil to you, Eugenia, will weigh with him even more than his own disappointment. He must feel, as I do, that you are acting under a fatal delusion that must—"

"Irene," interrupted her companion, "I must not listen to you if you speak thus. Tell me, my dear girl, something of yourself. I would learn all that has befallen you since we last met."

Irene sadly replied,

"Every thing that can crush life and hope out of a human heart; and I sometimes wonder how mine can still continue to beat, with the load of anguish that rests upon it. Eugenia, when last we met, I had parents, a home, hope for the future. Now you see me stripped of all. My mother fell a victim to the hourly persecutions we endured; my father, in a fit of frenzied indignation, with his own hand, gave to the flames the roof that was so dear to him, and then fled. A few hours before this act, he gave my hand clandestinely to Claude Chastain, to whom, you are aware, I have been long betrothed. We separated immedi-

ately after the ceremony. I was seized on, and conveyed to the Chateau de Montour by the commands of my uncle. Once Claude saw me there a few moments; and last night I was taken from my sick-bed and conveyed to the hall of condemnation in the Dominican Convent. There I found myself in the presence of three inquisitors, who were sitting in judgment on him to whom my uncle knew me to be, deeply attached, though he was not aware of our union until we proclaimed it at the moment of meeting. Oh! Eugenia, such a heart-rending meeting as it was! Those cruel men had brought us there, face to face, to make the love we have for each other a snare to us."

She paused, overwhelmed by the recollections that forced themselves upon her. Eugenia was deeply moved. Irene struggled against her anguish, and in a feeble voice went on,

"They offered us life, love, fortune, to relinquish our own faith, and only conform outwardly to the Papal Church; but my noble Claude, upheld by a strength bestowed on him by Him in whom we believe, refused. And I—although my spirit seemed ready to leave my body—I felt that he was right. Then they read that awful sentence—condemnation to the *auto da fé*; and offered me—me, his own in heart and soul, his life if I would abjure."

"And you surely could not refuse to save his life, when the alternative was yours? Oh! Irene, would that not have been cruel fanaticism? God looks only on the heart, and cares not for the form in which the devotee may offer worship to him."

Irene sat up before her, looking wild and excited,

"I know not what I might have been tempted to do to purchase the life that is so precious to me; but Claude himself came to my rescue. He refused to accept life on such terms. I have only a confused memory of all that followed, until I awoke here and found you beside me. I have a vague memory that the priest spoke kindly to me as he came along; but if they destroy him—if they give him

over to that cruel death, all their kindness will avail me nothing—I shall die or go mad.”

Eugenia endeavored to soothe the excitement of her mind by gentle and sympathizing words. Irene listened vaguely, for her mental suffering was, as yet, too great to permit consolation to enter her soul. Delicate food was brought to her, but she turned from it with loathing; her glittering eyes and flushed cheeks showed that fever had returned, and she moaned and muttered such words as moved the heart of the listener to its inmost depths. Eugenia at length took the burning hand of the sick girl in both her own, and said,

“Listen to me, Irene, and I may have power to console you. The prerogative of the Church is justice, and that has been awarded to Claude Chastain for leaving the faith in which he was educated. It is not for us to question the things that have been settled by the wisdom of men distinguished as much for piety as for learning; it is simply our duty to submit. But there is also a principle of mercy, which may be successfully appealed to. I promise you to intercede with the abbot, who is my confessor, in favor of Claude. On the occasion of my profession as a nun, I am certain he will grant me the favor I may desire to ask. I will then petition for the life that is so dear to you.”

“*Can* you, indeed, do this? Yet, my poor friend, the price you will pay for it is a heavy one.”

“I do not think so; on the contrary, it is my desire to shorten the term of my probation. My dear Irene, I hope yet to bring you to see the beauty of this august faith, which has stood through so many ages.”

“Save Claude,” murmured Irene, “and I will admit that a deed of mercy may be done in its name, as an offset to the sea of blood and tears it has caused to flow.”

Eugenia made no farther reply, for in the present state of her friend's mind she saw it would be quite useless. She administered a composing draught, and Irene fell into a broken slumber, from which, at moments, she started with

wild words, which revealed that even in sleep Chastain's cruel doom was constantly before her.

This interview had not, as both supposed, been private. Every word uttered by the two was noted down by one of the sisters deputed to act the part of spy on those who were thus thrown together. At the head of Irene's couch a recess was built, which opened into the apartment beyond; in the wall of her room were several skillfully-concealed apertures, which conducted sound from within with perfect accuracy to the ear applied to them. In this recess the spy was concealed and the record made; after being first submitted to the superior, it was by her transmitted to the abbot. By this means they ascertained how far they might trust Eugenia, and they could at any moment remove her from the influence of Irene, if it promised to endanger the principles they had been at such pains to instill into her mind.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE news of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes reached Nismes, and was celebrated by the Papists with exultation as the final blow to the heresy they were resolved to extirpate. The bells of the different churches rang out a joyous peal during the whole day, and congratulations were mutually offered by the priests and the people of the dominant religion.

The privileges granted by this edict had been gradually wrested from the Huguenots, under frivolous and cruel pretexts, until a mere shadow of those granted them by Henry IV. remained. This last wave of despotism swept that away, and left them entirely at the mercy of their persecutors. A royal decree had already abolished the schools and colleges of the Reformers, and destroyed many of their temples of worship; now the annihilation of the latter was to be completed. The first article in the act of revocation suppresses every protective edict, and ordains that all the places of worship belonging to the Huguenots, which were still found standing in the kingdom, should be immediately demolished. The ministers serving in them were ordered to leave the country within fifteen days after the publication of the edict, under the penalty of being sent to the galleys.

All persons who had fled from the country were commanded to return within four months, or suffer the loss of their estates by confiscation; and all Protestant subjects were forbidden to depart out of the realm, or convey away their effects, under pain of the galleys for the men, and confiscation of goods and money for the women. Such was the tender mercy of the King of France toward thousands of his most loyal and industrious subjects; and such an exodus as

followed the proclamation of this cruel document has never been witnessed since the days of the Hebrew flight from Egypt.

Although the frontiers were guarded, and the utmost severity was shown to the unfortunates who fell into the hands of the dragoons, thousands fled—many leaving all they possessed behind them; others, more far-seeing, had managed to provide some resources for this long-dreaded emergency, and carried with them a tithe of their possessions; but fatherland, the ties of home, were unhesitatingly sacrificed before they would return to the Church of Rome.

On the evening of this festive day the abbot walked on the terrace of the Chateau de Montour, in earnest conversation with its master. The latter said, with stern exultation,

"This has indeed been a glorious day for our beloved land. That blot on the memory of Henry IV. is expunged at last, and the power given to God's holy Church to sweep away the last vestige of heresy from our highly-favored country. Eureka! the battle is won, and the faithful triumphant!"

The priest ground his heel upon the stones beneath it, as he replied,

"Yes, it is done at last, and I will crush and destroy the miserable heretics with a more iron power than I have hitherto exercised, though I have done some good service to the cause. With my efficient aid, D'Aguesseau has reported many thousand conversions in the last six months, and he will soon have many more to swell the list. Ha! ha! it makes me laugh to think of the miserable creatures, who had not courage to face ruin and death sooner than become apostate to that faith they boast of as so much purer than ours. Poor wretches! they come to mass so reluctantly; they feel that they are acting a lie before man and God, and dread that, like Esau, they have bartered their birth-right for a mess of pottage."

De Montour regarded the speaker with surprise. "You

surely believe, father, that all those persons who have re-entered the Church must eventually be saved, it matters not what motive actuated them? Has not the universal Mother the power to save even her lukewarm children?"

"Assuredly, for the Pope has power to remit *all* sin; and he offers plenary indulgence and pardon to those who abjure their errors and return to our communion. But if the converted heretic still doubts the delegation of that sublime power to his Holiness, he is not happy in his new position; and that nearly all of them still refuse in their hearts to believe this dogma I have had sufficient proof. It does not matter much, however; their children pass under our influence, and in the next generation the wish of his majesty will be fulfilled—there will be but one Church and one Shepherd."

"Amen! so be it. Now let us talk of what immediately concerns one of these miserable creatures—my kinsman, Lefevre. His health fails him in this imprisonment; besides, I begin to fear he has gained some influence over my chaplain, which I do not like. I wish him to be sent secretly to the galleys, and you promised me the means of so doing."

"I will fulfill my promise; and I have thought of a rare plan to prevent him from surmising that his being transferred to the galleys was either your work or mine."

"How? I am impatient to learn what it can be."

"Listen, and you shall be enlightened. In consequence of the mandate to abolish the temples of the Huguenots, I shall issue an order for the destruction of the one which stands among the Black Mountains, about ten miles hence. It has been spared thus long because it had some peculiar privileges guaranteed to it, which the Duc de Noailles would not permit to be infringed; and as he has authority superior to that of my ally, D'Aguesseau, we have been compelled to wait until now. The day and hour of its destruction will be stated, and hundreds of these fanatical Huguenots will be sure to crowd there, at every hazard to themselves, to see the work done. If a minister of their faith dares to

appear among them, I will cause him to be seized, and offered up as a sacrifice to the expiring cause for which he has so vainly labored. On the evening before that day, release Lefevre; cause him to be placed under the guidance of those who will lead him to that temple; let him be told what is to take place there, and, my life on it, he will remain to witness its destruction, even if he is sure to meet his own doom amidst its ruins. Your emissaries can still remain near him, and in the confusion, hurry him away to Marseilles, where the order they will bear with them for placing him among the miserable wretches who man the galleys will insure his safe-keeping. Once under that discipline and he will not trouble you long. His son, should he return to seek him, will not be able to find his name upon the list of the condemned, and the simple number which designates the galley-slave will furnish no clew to his place of detention."

"Excellently contrived," was the calm reply. "I will put things in train to accomplish your plan. I will myself be present at the destruction of this temple; for it has long been a grief to me that it should be permitted to stand, while the teachings diffused from it were the means of misleading so many precious souls. Lefevre deserves no leniency at our hands; for he refuses even to listen to the holy revelations of the Church.

"Tell me, father, how does my niece progress? She has now been several weeks with the sisters, and I trust she begins to show some leaning toward the truth at last."

"I can not say that she has. Mademoiselle Lefevre seems to suffer so deeply in her mind, as the time for the execution of her lover draws near, that she turns a dull ear to the arguments addressed to her. The young sister in whose charge the superior has placed her has not lost all hope of winning her over. At all events, we must have patience with her until her mind is more at peace with itself."

An expression of vindictive anger passed over the features of the *Sieur de Montour*, and he harshly said,

"Remove Chastain from her path; when his fate is consummated, and the passion of grief that must follow is over, Irene may be induced to listen to reason. How long will it be before he will undergo his righteous sentence?"

"In one more week our preparations for a magnificent celebration in honor of the event which has just taken place will be completed. On the day set apart for it, a solemn *Te Deum* will be chanted in the Church in commemoration of this great triumph; the holy brotherhood will proceed from the altar in their robes of ceremony, in procession, to the public square; and surround the funeral pyre on which the heretics Laval and Chastain are to suffer. A third one will, I trust, be added in the person of a noted pastor of the desert, who, I have learned, will probably be present at the destruction of the Huguenot temple. If so, his doom is sealed."

"Right; let destruction overtake him who goes about sowing the seed of rebellion against the only true faith."

"On the evening of the same day a ceremony of a most interesting character will take place at the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy. Mademoiselle Altenberg, on that occasion, abjures the world, and takes the religious vows which bind her to a conventual life. It grows late, my son, and I must return to the city. You will need a faithful agent in this affair of Lefevre, and I will send Ferron to you to make such arrangements as are necessary; though he must not be seen by your prisoner. You are aware that he was the betrayer of the refugees in the cavern; and I find him so useful that I have kept him in my employment ever since. Confide to him what you wish done, and it will be accomplished. Benedicite my son."

De Montour reverently received the benediction, and the priest mounted the well-trained and elegantly caparisoned mule on which he sometimes rambled through the country, and slowly descended the road.

For the second time since M. Lefevre had been beneath his roof, the Sieur de Montour sought his cell. He tapped

lightly on the door, but no voice bade him enter, and he opened it without farther ceremony. Autumn was now far advanced, and the chilling dampness that met him caused him to shiver with cold. There was no means of keeping a fire in the miserable place, even if he would have permitted such an indulgence; and lying upon the wretched bed wrapped in the coverlet, to keep vital warmth in his body, was M. Lefevre, in a seeming stupor. His once healthy complexion had assumed a sallow hue, and his features were sunken and wasted.

"If I keep him here much longer he will die on my hands," was the thought that passed through the mind of his jailer. To arouse him, he threw down a chair, and at the noise the prisoner unclosed his eyes, and feebly asked,

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Lefevre. Gather your senses together, for I have something of importance to say to you."

M. Lefevre slowly raised himself, and sat erect, as he said,

"Excuse me for remaining upon the bed; the cold stones of the floor give me the rheumatism in my feet; and I am compelled to spend the most of my time here."

"You are very excusable. I only came hither to inform you that I am about to make arrangements for your release. I find you are resolute to adhere to your heresies, and I am weary of efforts that produce no result. The king has issued an edict commanding all Huguenot ministers to leave the country within fifteen days. I am aware that you have assumed that absurd calling, and sundry motives have induced me to give you a chance to escape before the time named in the edict has elapsed. Understand, however, that if you are found in France after the period named, and nine days are already gone, you will be seized and sent to the galleys."

A gleam of something like hope passed over the wan features of the prisoner; he raised his clasped hands, and devoutly said,

"Lord, I thank thee for this mercy to thy servant. Then

turning to De Montour, he continued: "I know not what has moved your heart of stone in my favor, unless it is by some special interposition of Providence. I accept the means of escape opened to me, uncertain as they are. But tell me, before I leave, may I not once more behold and speak with my daughter?"

"Irene is no longer under my protection," was the cold reply.

"Where, then, is she? What has become of my helpless child?"

"She is safe. Badly as you may think of me, I should not permit harm to come to her."

"But what have you done with her? Whither have you removed her?" urged the anxious father.

"Like yourself, Irene proved intractable in her religious opinions, and, for better instruction, I have placed her with the Sisters of Mercy. But I have no intention of forcing her to take the veil. I prefer giving her to a husband of her own station."

M. Lefevre sighed heavily. He replied,

"That fortunately is beyond your power: a barrier exists which must end your hopes there."

"Not so effectually as you may suppose. I am aware that an illegal ceremony of marriage was performed between her and Claude Chastain. But that tie, feeble as it is, will soon be broken; for he dies in another week, and my niece will be free to become Madame Delmont."

"Dies!" exclaimed M. Lefevre. "Unfortunate youth, have my instructions brought you to this!"

"Very likely," was the unmoved response; "for he is a heretic after your own pattern. Life, pardon, every thing, was offered him to reclaim him from his errors, but he refused them all; and when Irene might herself have saved him by mere conformity, she too was immovable."

An expression of joy diffused itself over the features of the prisoner, and he fervently exclaimed,

"Thank God! thank God! that they were found faithful

amidst such a trial. Since Chastain must die, those who love him will have the consolation of knowing that a merciful Saviour will receive so faithful a servant at once into Paradise. But is there no hope? Will the priests really sacrifice so noble a youth to his adherence to the principles he has avowed?"

"They will assuredly do so. A recreant to the faith of his fathers—a renegade unworthy to be called a son of Mother Church—let him perish in his obstinacy!"

As he arose to go, he added,

"A few nights hence you will be liberated, and placed under the guidance of a trusty servant, who will conduct you to the Huguenot temple, known among them as the valley church. You know the place well, and from there can doubtless find means to leave the country."

"If I am unmolested, I can easily find my way from that point. This may be only a new snare contrived for me by my enemies; but I will risk any thing to escape from this wearing captivity, which is slowly consuming my life. Adieu! De Montour, and may a God of justice judge between you and me."

"I am willing to abide by His decision," replied the other proudly, as he opened the door and passed from the cell.

M. Lefevre remained in a state of excitement in the prospect of liberation from a confinement which had become almost unendurable. Hope revived once more, and, in spite of the unpromising aspect of the future he trusted to the mercy of Heaven again to reunite him to his children in peace and safety. He spent the intervening days in a state of tremulous anxiety, lest the caprice of De Montour should lead him to change his mind as to his liberation.

On the second night after their interview, the prisoner was furnished with a suit of dark coarse clothing, and a heavy overcoat to protect him from the chilling air. He was then taken to the entrance of the chateau, where a mule awaited him, and also two men mounted on animals of the same kind. Without exchanging a word with him,

he was assisted to mount, and the three descended the winding road that led to the country below.

For himself, M. Lefevre had no desire to talk : to breathe the free air of heaven once more ; to feel that he was released from the power of one who hated him, was sufficient for the present ; and earnest and heartfelt were his thanks for the mercy which had opened to him a prospect of deliverance.

The night was clear, and lighted by a brilliant autumn moon. The sure-footed animals picked their way with unerring precision over the rough road, and, after traveling through the valley about two miles, they again ascended among the Black Mountains. They passed through many a gorge of romantic beauty, and, after a ride of two hours, reached the opening of a sheltered vale girdled by mountain peaks, whose lofty tops were already white with snow.

Protected from the keen north winds, the valley yet wore its garniture of green, and the forest trees still retained their brilliant autumn foliage. It was past midnight when they entered this secluded spot, and the Queen of Night cast long oblique lines of silvery light into the quiet vale, in the centre of which stood a simple temple, dedicated to the service of God by those who were not permitted to raise their houses of worship in the cities of the land. Few of the graces of architecture were lavished upon it, and the structure arose in graceful simplicity amidst the forest trees which had been left standing around it. Its proportions were accurate, and the white walls gleamed through the masses of foliage as a beacon of hope to many weary hearts which had sought in vain amidst the gorgeous splendor of the Romish Church for one true hope, or noble aspiration for the future. A slender spire rose above it, surmounted by a hand pointing heavenward. A short flight of steps led into the vestibule of the temple, and in front of these the party dismounted.

For the first time one of the men addressed M. Lefevre :

"I was commanded to bring you to this spot, and leave you to find your way to the sea. You will doubtless be

able to escape by some passing boat, and, to enable you to do so, the Sieur de Montour commanded me to give you this purse at the moment of parting."

M. Lefevre motioned the offering away:

"Keep your gold, friend. It can be of little use to me; now I am free, I can find those who will aid me, 'without money and without price,' to escape from this wretched country. Many of my brethren are scattered about here, and they will not refuse me the assistance they may soon need themselves."

"As you please, monsieur; but I would not advise you to linger near this spot, for to-morrow this valley will be crowded with excited thousands—some to destroy and exult, others to bewail the loss they will never be permitted to repair. Among the crowd you would be sure to be recognized, and the next time you are taken your imprisonment will be more severe than that you have just left."

M. Lefevre sat down on the steps quite overcome by this announcement. He asked,

"Who has authorized this last outrage?"

"Who should do so but the king? The edict that protected the accursed heretics is at last revoked, and we are to make short work with the temples and those that worship in them. Every house is to be demolished without loss of time, and orders have been issued for the destruction of this one to-morrow."

The listener groaned in spirit over this announcement, but he made no reply. The man went on:

"Having now fulfilled my orders, monsieur, I must leave you here, and return to the chateau."

He made a slight salutation, which was copied by his silent companion, and the two rode away. After gaining the shelter of a clump of trees several hundred yards distant, they checked their mules, and the one who had not hitherto spoken dismounted. He briefly said,

"Take back my mule, Baptiste, for I shall not need him, and report yourself to the Sieur de Montour. I must

keep this old heretic in sight, and make sure that he does not really escape."

Ferron, for he it was, so carefully disguised as to defy detection, returned by a circuitous path to the church, and peered around to see where M. Lefevre was. He found him kneeling on the steps, praying audibly for the welfare of his persecuted brethren; the bigot removed from his vicinity, and, taking out his rosary, began to say over the aves to the Virgin, dividing his attention between his devotions and the proceedings of his charge.

At length M. Lefevre arose, remounted his mule, and went slowly and disconsolately upon his weary way. About a mile from the church was the cottage of a shepherd of his own faith; and there the wanderer knew he would be welcomed, and such aid afforded him as would enable him to reach the sea-side in safety.

Absorbed in painful thought, he did not once look backward, and the prowling form that tracked his steps needed not the care he took to keep in the shadow of the hills. At length the path wound upward to the door of an humble alpine cottage, consisting of two roughly-built rooms, formed by piling stones on each other and cementing them with mud. The roof was thatched with straw, and the rough structure was completely covered with a wild forest creeper, which wound its verdant tendrils over the jagged surface, concealing deformity and imparting beauty.

A rap on the door brought the shepherd to it; but, before opening to his visitor, he cautiously asked who demanded admittance. M. Lefevre had no sooner pronounced his name than the door was unclosed, and, with many expressions of welcome, the shepherd came forth to assist him to dismount. He said,

"The story went, monsieur, that you had escaped; then it was said the priests had you in prison; but blessed be God that I see you once more free. There is one within who has just been asking me after you, and he will be joyful to see you."

"Who is it, Gueran? My heart will welcome the sight of any friend."

"Come in and see for yourself, monsieur; for this good man is a sight worth seeing at any time, I can tell you."

M. Lefevre followed him across the outer apartment, and uttered an exclamation of surprise as he met M. Lecroix on the threshold of the inner one. They embraced each other cordially, and then entered the chamber of the pastor to hold communion on all that had befallen them since they last parted.

M. Lefevre heard with emotion of the visit of his son to Amsterdam, and his intention of returning immediately to Languedoc. On the day after his interview with Gerauld, M. Lecroix had set out on his pilgrimage to the scene of his labors. Hearing of the decree which commanded the destruction of the valley church, he was resolved to be present, and, before the sacrilege was completed, to read to his people a pastoral letter with which he had been charged by the ministers who had been compelled to find safety in flight, and in a foreign land hold meetings for the purpose of expressing their entire sympathy with their suffering brethren.

After a long conversation, M. Lefevre said,

"I am strangely moved to remain until after to-morrow, dangerous to my liberty as it may be to do so. Gerauld has had sufficient time to reach Nismes, and if he is near enough to come, the news of the destruction of the church will surely draw him thither. We may meet there, and how my heart yearns for that meeting no soul can comprehend that has not been tried as mine has been. Besides, it seems to me that, as a pastor of this persecuted sect, I should remain, and assist in performing the last services that may be held in our desecrated temple."

"My friend, it will be a great risk; for the dragoons will be there in force to execute the mandate, and the priests to exult in the destruction they have at length accomplished. You will surely be recognized, and the result may be fatal to you."

"And to you also," replied M. Lefevre. "The danger is equally great to both of us. The priests have long been exasperated against you, and if you fall into their power they will never permit you to escape."

"My help cometh even from the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth; if it seemeth good unto him, He will bring me out of darkness, and out of the shadow of death, and break my bonds in sunder.' With this faith in my soul, I go upon my appointed path; for the sworn servant of God should never shrink from his duty."

"Such also is my belief. I, too, have assumed the sacred duties of the pastor, and to-morrow I will accompany you, strong in my faith that God can protect his own; for it is said, 'The Lord will not fail his people.'"

The persuasions of M. Lecroix could not move him from this determination, and after offering up prayers for their scattered and desolate people, the two endeavored to obtain a few hours of repose as a preparation for the eventful day that approached.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE day dawned clear and tranquil. Nature bore upon her serene face no premonition of the sacrilegious violence about to be committed. The birds caroled their morning songs amidst the grove that surrounded the valley church, in happy unconsciousness that their peaceful home was about to be desecrated by armed men bent on an errand of wrong and violence.

At an early hour groups of dejected women and angry-looking men began to gather in the valley; they continued to increase in numbers, until not only the church, but the grove around it, was filled with the afflicted Huguenots. On hearing that their last temple in the vicinity of Nismes was to be destroyed, they had collected from every direction, in the hope that, by showing their numbers, they might intimidate their ruthless persecutors.

By nine o'clock many hundreds had assembled, and they anxiously awaited the appearance of some minister of their faith to conduct the last services which would ever be performed in their beloved temple. There was no certainty that one would arrive, for the pastors of the desert were scattered far and wide, and the news of the intended violence might not have reached one in time to permit him to gain the scene of action.

In such an event one of the lay members must officiate, and the voice of praise be once more heard in those walls before the wail of lamentation arose over their downfall. Suddenly a murmur of rejoicing and congratulation spread from group to group, and one, who was known to all present as a faithful servant of God, was seen slowly advancing among them, accompanied by a gray-haired man, in whom many of them also recognized M. Lefevre.

Their hands were silently grasped, and a way was opened for them to the door of the church. As he entered, M. Lecroix reverently lifted his cap, and repeated those grandly solemn words which ring as an anthem in the soul,

“‘The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him.’”

Every portion of the house was crowded, but free passage to the altar was instantly afforded him and his companion. Together they entered the pulpit, and the pastor presented M. Lefevre to the assembled Huguenots in his lately assumed character. He then opened the service by reading the one hundred and thirty-seventh psalm from a small pocket Bible he brought with him. Then M. Lefevre commenced a hymn well known to all present; the strain was taken up by those without, and it swelled in waves of sound, echoed back from the hillsides, until the whole welkin seemed to ring with the song of praise. After praying, M. Lecroix read a portion of the seventy-seventh psalm as a text appropriate to this sad occasion. “Will the Lord absent himself forever? and will he be no more entreated?” “Thy way, oh God! is holy; who is so great a God as our God?”

From these words he delivered to them a brief and touching address which all present remembered to their dying day, as the last testimony of the devoted martyr to the cause to which he had given all the years of his manhood. Then M. Lefevre spoke a few sentences calculated to soothe the irritated spirits, who asked “Why God permitted such wrongs toward men desirous of advancing his cause on earth.” He reminded them that the ways of God are not as our ways, and they must patiently wait his own good time to deliver them from the evil snares of the enemy.

His remarks were brief, for much remained to be accomplished, and the appearance of the dragoons might be expected at any moment. M. Lecroix read the pastoral letter with which he was charged, and it drew tears and exclamations of grief from many of those present; then a

number of children were brought forward to receive baptism, over whose infant brows the bitter waters of affliction had already flowed.

After this ceremony was sung the last psalm that would ever arise to the praise of God in those doomed walls. Voices choking with emotion joined the strain, which more resembled one vast sob rising on the wings of the wind to waft their wrongs to the throne of mercy than a song of praise. Then came the blessing, uttered amidst breathless silence.

After this the most affecting scene of all took place: the people passed before their ministers to bid them adieu before they went into exile, and to receive their last solemn benediction in their beloved temple. Nearly all of them were weeping, and many were ready to cry aloud in the anguish of their souls.

While this scene proceeded, and the vast crowd defiled slowly before the altar, the silence was broken by the thundering of hoofs upon the turf without, and the Huguenots scattered before a troop of dragoons that drew up in front of the temple. These were followed by a procession of monks, telling their beads, and exulting in the work of desolation about to commence.

In the rear of these came several carriages containing devout Papists, who wished to witness the destruction of the heretical building, from which they believed so much evil doctrine had been disseminated. Among these intolerant bigots were M. de Montour and his daughter; and it was the earnest wish of the fanatical father that Bertha's hand should remove the first stone from the doomed edifice. For this purpose he had brought her there, and the suggestion she was only too ready to obey.

The dragoons dismounted, and, rushing into the house with loud shouts and imprecations, scattered the unarmed people before them. A small group collected in front of the altar, where stood the two venerable men who had just officiated; but those noble heads, with silvery hair floating

around them, those saintly aspects, daunted not these pursuers, long since hardened in crime and barbarity. The soldiers had been ordered to make prisoners of those they found officiating as ministers; but not contented with mere obedience, they thrust their pikes into the resistless arms that were held up in benediction over the unhappy people. They were struck to the floor; M. Lecroix severely wounded, while M. Lefevre escaped with a trifling hurt. An effort was made by the Huguenots to rescue them; but it was baffled by the soldiers, who wielded their arms with such effect as to clear the house of the worshipers in a few moments.

A scene of riot and bloodshed would doubtless have followed this commencement, had not a second troop of armed men dashed into the valley, commanded by the Duc de Noailles in person. He was dreaded by the dragoons as a strict disciplinarian, and he was also a man who endeavored to maintain some show of justice in his dealings with the Protestants, though he had no sympathies with them. Order was instantly restored among the soldiers; the Huguenots were commanded to separate themselves from the others, and occupy the ground in the rear of the temple.

The two prisoners were placed under guard, and the work of demolition regularly commenced. The soldiers were permitted to wreak their fury on the interior of the building, and its simple and chaste architectural ornaments were hewn and defaced in every possible manner. Then levers were brought forward and the stones loosened. Before one had fallen, the Sieur de Monteur, leading his beautiful daughter, came before the commander and petitioned that she might be permitted to remove the first stone with her own fair hands.

The Duc de Noailles bowed lowly before the lady possessing this singular ambition, and in courteous terms granted the request. At his command the men fell back, and the stately form of Mademoiselle de Montour approached the entrance, where a projection in the wall enabled her to reach the cap-stone without much effort. With eyes beam-

ing with exultation she drew it forth; and as it rolled to her feet, said, in a tone loud enough to be heard by all around,

"Thus perish every heretical work raised in defiance of the Church of God!"

The soldiers lifted their caps, and a simultaneous shout burst from their lips. Bertha drew herself proudly up, and for an instant a disdainful smile quivered on her features; she was far too haughty to receive this sympathy in her fanaticism as it was meant; but when the Duc de Noailles approached, and complimented her on her devotion to the true cause, she blushed and smiled most graciously upon him. With the gallantry of an accomplished cavalier he conducted her to her carriage, and remained beside it engaged in an animated conversation while the work of demolition proceeded.

This distinction charmed both M. de Montour and his daughter; and both began to indulge visions of future greatness, based on the evident admiration of the elegant courtier for the latter. At length De Noailles asked,

"What reward shall I decree to you, mademoiselle, for the religious act you so gracefully performed just now?"

Her father replied for her,

"God will doubtless reward her for performing so meritorious a service, and to Him we prefer leaving it, monseigneur."

"My father is right," said Bertha, seriously. "If I have done well in the sight of Heaven, I shall surely be dealt with according to my deserts."

"But mademoiselle, Heaven chooses earthly agents by which its will is accomplished; and I shall take care that the handsomest diamond which can be found in Paris shall soon grace the fair hand that was lifted in so holy a cause."

The young lady smiled graciously, and the duc considered his proposed present as accepted.

In the mean time the work of demolition had gone rapidly forward; the walls were skillfully undermined, and at

a signal from the sergeant in command of the zealous workmen, the whole fabric fell in with a loud crash. A cry of anguish arose from the Huguenots, which was drowned by the loud and triumphant shouts of the soldiers, who made every demonstration of the wildest joy. The priests raised a chant of thanksgiving, and while it yet filled the valley the crowd began to disperse.

The captain of the troops that first arrived sought the prisoners; M. Lefevre had disappeared, and the men in charge of him could give no satisfactory account of him. From his neglected wound, M. Lecroix had bled until he was nearly exhausted, and in a state of partial insensibility he was thrown across a horse behind one of the dragoons, and thus conveyed to Nismes to be given over to the tender mercies of the inquisitors. His fate was already decided, and his condemnation to be broken on the wheel, and then burned at the stake, was pronounced in a few hours. In the mean time he was thrown into a loathsome cell, and only enough attention given to his painful wound to prevent it from proving fatal before the day of his execution arrived.

Elated with the success of the morning's work, the troops formed in regular order on one side of the glen, and a band of music they had brought with them sent forth its exulting strains, while the depressed Huguenots slowly defiled from the scene of destruction. A deputation from them came before the Duc de Noailles, and petitioned for the liberation of their pastors, but he sternly refused, and commanded them to follow their departing friends without delay. He assured them that but one minister had been taken, and he had been so long known as the disseminator of the wildest heresies against the Church, that he must be dealt with accordingly.

Twenty years of persecution under a despotic government and a tyrannical Church, resolute to maintain her own supremacy at the expense of every law, either human or divine, had so completely broken the spirit of the Prot-

estants, that they submitted without an attempt at resistance. But this submission to the ruling powers was not always to last; and years afterward, when justice was at length despaired of, arose the bloody struggle known as the Camisard war, of which the same ground over which we have passed was the theatre. But for the present the people had been taught that to render unto Cæsar the things that are his must be a portion of their faith, and obedience to the authority of the king, however unrighteously used, must be rendered.

They dispersed, and went slowly to their homes, many of them to fly from their native land within a few more days, to escape the persecutions they knew would now rage against those of their faith with additional fury.

While this scene went on, the occupants of the different carriages alighted and walked around the ruins. Unmoved by the sorrow of so many of their fellow-beings over the destruction of their temple, they expressed mutual congratulations on the work which had been so thoroughly completed.

The act of Mademoiselle de Montour made her quite a heroine among them, and Bertha listened with exultation to the praises lavished on her. She really believed she had performed an act well pleasing in the sight of Heaven, and some signal favor would be granted her as a reward for her zeal.

At length the Huguenots had all departed. One troop of dragoons had already left the spot, and that of the Duc de Noailles formed in marching order, and sounded their bugles as a signal for final departure. The visitors entered their vehicles, and prepared to follow in the rear of the soldiers.

The carriage of the Sieur de Montour was the last one in the cortège, and when they issued from the valley, Bertha proposed to her father to stop at a point from which a view of the precipitous road, winding for miles over the broken country, was visible. They thus escaped the dust raised by

the dragoons, and enjoyed the fine view of the procession defiling in the evening sunlight over the distant hills; while the triumphant strains of music that floated on the still air seemed almost to die away as they descended into a valley, and again burst forth exultingly as they reached another crest of the mountains.

The evening was one of still beauty, and Bertha enjoyed the hour they remained stationary with peculiar zest. The cavalcade had entirely disappeared, when she turned to her father and said,

"Now let us go on, father. I feel as if a good deed has been consummated in the sight of Heaven. 'The blind leading the blind' will no longer be permitted; for the voice of God has spoken in the mandate of the king, and heresy shall be utterly extirpated."

"Assuredly, yes, my daughter. A few more weeks, and the strong-holds of heresy—the temples—will no longer exist as an abomination in the land."

There was perfect sympathy between the two on this subject; and, as the carriage was slowly driven forward, they continued their conversation in the same strain. The road in many places was dangerous for a carriage; and, as twilight approached, M. de Montour became uneasy at being still among the hills. He commanded the driver to travel faster, and, in reply, was informed that they were approaching the worst part of the route, and he must proceed with caution.

Bertha raised the window, which had been closed to keep out the chill evening air, and looked forth with a slight feeling of apprehension. They were emerging from a gorge upon a narrow road, skirted on one side by a deep ravine, and on the other by the hillside, from which it had been cut. It was barely wide enough for a carriage to pass, and should another vehicle be met before getting around the curve, both might be precipitated on the rocks below.

M. de Montour prided himself on the beauty of his horses; and the pair in the carriage were spirited bays, which had

not long been subjected to the constraint of harness. He was about to open the door, to alight with his daughter, and walk over this dangerous place, when the horses took fright at some object in the road, and reared and plunged so violently that the driver lost all control over them. The man jumped from his seat in time to save himself, as the unwieldy vehicle made a violent lurch toward the precipice.

The traveler whose sudden appearance on the road had frightened them threw himself from his mule, and, seizing the bridle, made violent efforts to restrain their downward career; but the impulse already given them was too great. To save himself, he was compelled to release his grasp, and throw himself violently backward, while the unruly steeds and the heavy coach, with its helpless occupants, went crashing down the precipice.

A few moments of breathless horror followed; no cry came from below; and the two men gazed on each other with pallid cheeks. The driver at length said,

"I'm afraid they are killed; but the devil himself could not a' held them hosses."

"Come with me," said the stranger, a respectable-looking citizen; "there is a pathway down the ravine. Let us look after these unhappy people."

With some difficulty they descended the precipitous path, and stood beside the shattered carriage. The horses had been too severely injured by the fall to move; and M. de Montour had extricated himself from the ruins in a stunned and bewildered condition, which rendered him oblivious even of the state of his daughter.

Bertha, pale, and apparently dying, lay with her head in contact with the rock against which it had been dashed with such violence as to produce a concussion of the brain: there was no external wound, save that her right hand, which she seemed instinctively to have raised to protect her face, was completely crushed.

The stranger lifted her in his arms, and as the fading twi-

light fell upon her features, he recognized her. Taking the bleeding hand in his own, he solemnly said,

"Behold the retributive justice of God. This hand, so lately raised in sacrilegious outrage, will never again know its own cunning."

By this time the unhappy father began to recover sufficiently to understand what passed around him. With a cry of anguish, he threw himself toward the nerveless form the stranger sustained, and took her in his own arms. For the first time for years human feeling was aroused in the breast of this man, who had so hardly dealt with others, and he comprehended what it was to suffer. In his prosperity, he had forgotten that the arrows of misfortune could be launched at himself; and in his egotistic love for his daughter, he had almost ceased to remember that she was of mortal mould, and subject, like others, to accident or death.

"She is not dead," he sternly said. "The Virgin will not permit death to be sent to one who this day so signally served her cause. Oh! holy Mother of God, listen to the supplications of thy faithful follower: let thy saints plead for mercy to be shown to me. Save my child—save her, I pray thee, and I promise a votive offering worthy of thy acceptance."

"Poor miserable fanatic!" exclaimed the stranger, compassionately. "One prayer to God were worth a lifetime of such supplications. Praying to all the saints in the calendar can not save your daughter, unless measures are taken to gain speedy assistance for her."

"Why is not something done, then?" asked the bewildered father. "She must be taken to the chateau without loss of time—oh! what can be done?"

"The driver can take my mule and ride to Nismes for such assistance as we need. I will remain with you until it arrives."

The Sieur de Montour acquiesced in this arrangement, and with alacrity the driver obeyed the command. The energetic stranger then sought among the ruins of the car-

riage, from which he drew the cushions, and arranged them in such a manner as to afford a resting-place for the insensible girl. Life still palpitated in her frame, and lent a feeble motion to her heart; but no sign of returning consciousness was yet visible, and the compassionate eye that scanned her features in the gathering twilight saw that intelligence would never again beam from those orbs, over whose closed lids a faint purple hue was already spreading. At length M. de Montour looked up at the earnest face of his companion, and asked,

"Who are you? How did you come hither so opportunely?"

The stranger sternly replied,

"I am one of those who stood tamely by to-day, and saw the holy temple of God defiled and destroyed, while I said in my heart, In His own good time He will avenge this sacrilegious impiety; but I little expected that one of the prominent actors in the scene would so soon meet the retribution her unwomanly act merited. God forgive me for speaking thus; for she lies there stricken and dying, and I, a miserable fellow-worm, should not judge her harshly."

All the old haughtiness of M. de Montour returned as he listened, and he said,

"She is not dying—she shall not die; and you were on our path—you caused this calamity of which you dare to speak as a judgment from Heaven."

"I as sincerely believe it to be such, as I believe in the mercy of God. I was proceeding quietly on my way, when your horses overtook me; and why they should have reared at the sight of a peaceful traveler, I know not; unless it was for the especial purpose of bringing to pass the punishment that surely finds its victim. Look at that hand, and then ask yourself if chance alone produced this catastrophe."

There was stern grandeur in the manner of the speaker; and in him the Sieur de Montour recognized one of the many strong souls who, in those days, struggled against the perse-

cutions they were compelled to bear with a fanaticism equal to that which oppressed them. He replied with asperity,

"Know that if death be sent to my child, I shall have faith to believe that the service performed by her this day merited being taken into heaven itself to receive her reward."

The listener regarded him with an expression of commiseration, with which contempt was mingled. "Poor priest-ridden creature," he muttered. "If such consolation can be yours, clasp it to your heart."

He presently spoke aloud:

"You asked me who I am. I will tell you. I am one who has been deprived of the means of gaining my bread honestly, by having my occupation taken from me on account of my religious belief. I have borne imprisonment, stripes, and contumely from those in authority, and I was on my way to find egress from this land accursed by her rulers, when, at imminent risk to myself, I stopped to aid you. I will remain with you till assistance arrives; then I must go on my way."

De Montour made no reply, and the two sunk into silence, which was only interrupted by the heavy and convulsive breathing of the senseless Bertha. Twilight had faded into night, and the stars looked down on that sad scene in all their serene beauty. The stranger looked reverently up to them, and prayed for the dying girl; but her father never lifted his eyes from her face. He mechanically muttered aves to the Virgin, with the dull conviction that if aid could be obtained, it must be through her intercession.

At length voices were heard approaching; lights gleamed from the road above, and in a few more moments a group of persons surrounded them. A surgeon accompanied them, and he at once examined the patient: to the imploring gaze of the father, he only replied by saying,

"It is necessary to convey Mademoiselle de Montour to

the chateau as speedily as possible. I have had a litter brought, and she can be removed without much suffering."

"Do you think she is sensible of suffering, doctor?" asked the father, tremulously. "Oh God! I fear she will never be aroused to feel any thing again."

"I hope she will, monsieur. I trust that I can restore her," replied the surgeon, evasively. "Let us lose no time, for it is precious."

The scarcely breathing form was placed tenderly upon the litter, and with care lifted to the road above. As they were leaving the spot, M. de Montour remembered the assistance he had received from the stranger, and turned to thank him; but he had already mounted his mule and left the party.

With the assistance of one of the men, M. de Montour was enabled to follow the sad procession, with the terrible conviction in his heart that the pride of his life was laid low, and henceforth he was desolate. They reached the chateau. Bertha was placed on her bed, and every effort that skill could devise, was used to restore consciousness. In vain: the heavy breathing sunk away to a scarcely perceptible respiration; the violet tinge spread over the sunken features, and settled in heavy shadows around the lips and eyes.

Then the anguish of the unhappy father took another phase. He had summoned the priests to perform the last rites of the Church, and with frantic eagerness he implored the surgeon to restore consciousness to her for a brief space, that she might join in them. To him it was an inexpressible horror that she should die before extreme unction had been administered. When convinced that it was impossible, he made a sign to the priests to perform their office without delay, and the ceremony was at once commenced.

The father knelt on a cushion at the foot of the couch, with his eyes immovably fastened on the features on which the seal of death was rapidly stamping itself. He prayed for a sign that all was well with the departing spirit: mir-

acles were of common occurrence in the Church—why should not one be performed in his favor?

The officiating priest, imbued with all the craft of his calling, was quite willing to lend his aid to produce such a delusion. As he leaned over the couch to anoint the dying girl with the holy chrism, he dexterously lifted the crushed hand, and held it an instant before her father. Starting back with an appearance of reverential awe, he said,

“Behold, my son! A miracle has been vouchsafed by the blessed Mother of God! See! that hand, which so lately was lifted in holy service to the Church, is permitted to give you the assurance for which you so earnestly supplicate. Your daughter will receive her glorious reward.”

Again the maimed hand sunk heavily on the coverlet, and, at the same instant, the last breath of Bertha de Montour passed from her lips.

Calmed by this assurance, the father arose, and, in the sternness of his fanatical faith, felt enabled to bear the sudden calamity which had overtaken him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE quiet shadows of evening were beginning to settle over the ruins of the Chateau Lefevre, when a traveler dismounted near the broken gate leading into the garden, and, securing his jaded horse, walked through the sombre alleys. Bitterly painful was the desolation before him; for here had been the home of his boyhood—these scenes the first that had stamped themselves upon his youthful heart. The ruins of his home lay before him, and he leaned against the side of the rude fountain, and gazed with melancholy sadness upon them, while he questioned in his own mind the means of gaining authentic information of those they once sheltered, without danger of compromising himself with the all-powerful priesthood.

After meeting with several detentions on the road, and narrowly escaping imprisonment, Gerauld Lefevre had succeeded in reaching this spot in safety. His heart irresistibly prompted him to visit it first; and he also cherished a vague hope that some retainer of his family might still linger near his former home, who could afford him such information of his father and sister as would guide him in his search after them.

All seemed desolate around him; and the slanting sunbeams lay in dreamy stillness on the hillsides, on which not a sign of human life was visible. Gerauld was about to move from the spot, when the silence was suddenly broken by a voice singing a popular air of the day, and a heavy footstep came through a neighboring walk. He paused, and awaited the appearance of the singer. In another moment he approached the fountain, beside which the young officer stood, and he saw from his dress that he belonged to the king's dragoons. The man also recognized the uniform

of an officer in the royal service, and courteously saluted its wearer as he said,

"A fine evening, monsieur, although this is a melancholy spot to see it from."

"Yes; and these ruins seem to have been lately made," replied Lefevre, anxious to draw him out on the subject.

"Ay—it's a sad story they could tell; but these are not the times to speak one's mind about them. I might get myself into trouble if I should say what I think."

The tone of the man, and something in his face, assured Lefevre that he was not unfriendly to his family, and he asked,

"Can you tell me where the former owner and his daughter are now to be found, my friend? I am deeply interested in learning; and you shall be far from having cause to repent affording me information concerning them."

The dragoon, who was no other than Ammonet, gazed keenly on the face of the stranger, and then said,

"I can readily name you, Colonel Lefevre, from your resemblance to your father; and I am glad that I can tell you what you wish to know, though it is not very cheering news to give a son and brother."

"What is it?" Gerauld eagerly asked. "Something to guide me in my search after them is all I ask."

"That I can give you, monsieur. Your father was present at the destruction of the valley church three days ago. He was taken prisoner, but escaped in some strange way—probably through the agency of his friends—and is, I hope, by this time safe out of the country. Your sister is in a convent near the city, where the Sieur de Montour intends her to stay until she consents to take my captain for a husband."

"Who, then, is your captain?"

"Auguste Delmont, at your service," said a voice close beside them; and, with a military salute, the dragoon fell back and gave place to his commander, who had come upon them thus suddenly.

"And I am Gerauld Lefevre," said the young officer. "In one who would claim the hand of my sister I fear not to behold an enemy."

"Nor do you," was the frank response, as Delmont grasped his hand. "Averse as our interests may seem—for I now claim the broad lands on which we stand—I welcome you with sincerity; and I will aid you to rescue your sister from the captivity in which she is held without demanding as my reward the hand which I now know has long been the property of another."

Lefevre returned the pressure warmly as he replied, "I believe you to be sincere, Captain Delmont, and I trust you with the frankness which one honorable man should know how to show toward another. My father, I learn, has escaped, for which I am deeply thankful; but my poor Irene is in the power of the priests, and I shall need strong aid to recover her."

"True; but, with my assistance, I think we can succeed in rescuing her. Let us sit down on this bench and confer together, not as strangers, but as those who might have been brothers, had not fate so willed it, that, ere I knew her, the heart of Irene was given to another."

Gerauld seated himself, and Delmont turned toward the dragoon and said,

"Ammonet, prepare supper for us in the cottage, and see if you can contrive a bed for Colonel Lefevre, as he must be my guest to-night." He added, by way of explanation, "We have had such fine weather this season, and the scenes enacted in Nismes make me so heart-sick, that, when I can escape from them, I retire to the steward's cottage in the dell below, and live there, with only Ammonet for my attendant. I was on my way there this evening when we met."

"You do not, then, approve all that is done in yonder city?" said Gerauld.

"I am a Catholic," responded Delmont, with energy; "but God help the Church that can only sustain its tenets

by such means as are there used. I have long been disgusted with the barbarity of the priests, countenanced by those in authority; and if any man dared there to express the feelings of his heart, I should long since have given utterance to mine. But a suspicion only of sympathy with the persecuted Huguenots would be destruction to one situated as I am. It is fortunate for both of us that we met here, where we are free from observation. My attendant is faithful, and so anxious to serve Mademoiselle Lefevre, that he would undertake any thing we might desire. And now will you listen to an explanation I have to make to you?"

"Certainly. I am all attention."

Delmont sat down beside him, and earnestly proceeded:

"It is a year since I was stationed in Nismes, and a portion of the troop I nominally commanded was placed in the chateau of your father. I was not permitted to accompany them, because the officers of higher grade and human feeling are not intrusted with the service those wretches, the dragoons, are empowered to perform. They retain merely the name of commander, and remain in the town in the vicinity, while the real authority is delegated to a petty officer chosen for his brutality. Several squads of my company were thus quartered on proprietors in the neighborhood; but I had no power to control them, for their orders came directly from D'Aguesseau, or from the priests, who are his most active agents.

"I made the acquaintance of your father's family. I became interested in them, and, so far as I could, I protected them from the worst indignities the soldiers were permitted to inflict on others with impunity. But I was not permitted to do much; the priests constantly circumvented me; and at last your father was driven to the destruction of his own chateau. I was warned in time to rescue Irene, and place her under the protection of the only friend that could save her from being thrust at once into a convent—her uncle, the Sieur de Montour.

"In the mean time, the lands of your family were offered

for sale at a tithe of their value. I purchased them, in the hope that the possession of her native home would be a temptation to Irene to accept my hand; but believe me when I assure you that it was never my intention to retain them from the lawful heir, without returning him an equivalent which he would consider of equal value."

"I believe you, and I thank you," said Lefevre, earnestly. "You are worthy of Irene, and if she had not loved Chastain, she must have returned the affection of so noble a fellow as you are."

"Thank you; this appreciation from you is worth much to me. I was not aware of your sister's preference for Chastain; for his position rendered their intercourse very guarded. I hoped on, in the belief that love as sincere as mine must win a return. But a few weeks since, M. de Montour discovered, through the confession of Irene herself, that she is already united to Chastain. The priests, aided by her uncle, subjected them both to a most cruel ordeal, in the hope of shaking their allegiance to the faith they profess; but they remained true. Since I have learned these particulars, my feelings toward Irene have undergone a singular change. It is no longer the woman I love, but the angel I reverence for her noble nature, and I am ready to devote my life to the promotion of her happiness. I have already used such influence as I possess to have the sentence of Chastain changed to transportation, which will give them a chance of again meeting on a foreign strand. The death of the Sieur de Montour's daughter has softened his hard heart, and to-day he partially consented to join me in my efforts to save him from the cruel fate that menaces him."

"My uncle, then, has at last found that he has a heart in his bosom," said Lefevre, bitterly.

"He has received a terrible blow, which must have struck home. Where I slept last night, I heard Bertha's fate commented on, and the simple people said that a miracle was performed to assure her father of her acceptance in heaven."

"Some trick of the priests," replied Delmont, with an

expression of disgust. "The poor old man believes that she was removed from him because the act she perpetrated the day the valley church was destroyed was one of such sublime piety that no earthly compensation was sufficient for it. He thus consoles himself for her loss; but he will not long survive her. The priests are already around him endeavoring to induce him to enter a monastery, that they may make sure of his fortune."

"And they will succeed. A fitting end it will be for one of his iron nature to become a slave to that spiritual despotism that was the only influence before which he yielded in life."

"And now," said Delmont, after reflecting a moment, "we must devise a feasible plan for releasing your sister. I learned from M. de Montour that Irene is more tranquil, and her health is improving, under the care of a young friend who is passing her novitiate in the same house, and through her influence they hope ultimately to win Mademoiselle Lefevre over to the Church."

"If Irene is true to herself and the faith in which she has been educated, such will never be the result. Oh! would that the truth from her lips could undo the work of the subtle priests themselves, and become the means of rescuing her companion from the darkness into which she is plunging," exclaimed Lefevre, with emotion.

"Ah! my friend, their intercourse is watched, you may be sure; and any attempt to proselyte on the part of Irene, if listened to by Mademoiselle Altenberg, would insure their speedy separation. It is now too late for the latter to waver, for her profession takes place in a few days. I am told that she is one peculiarly formed to find happiness in the seclusion of a cloister."

"She is a being to make an atmosphere of peace and happiness wherever she may be placed," said the lover, with emotion; "but to bury her in the senseless seclusion practiced by these people is an outrage on nature and feeling. Oh! if I had only the power to defy the priests, and bear

away both their captives, I would gladly leave my fatherland forever; nor feel one pang in parting from all earthly interests that bound me to it."

He arose and paced the ground in front of the seat with agitated steps. Delmont waited until his emotion had somewhat subsided before he again spoke. He at length said,

"Mademoiselle Altenberg seems deliberately to have chosen her own lot, and we must leave her to it; but your sister can be reclaimed through the *Sieur de Montour*, if we can only induce him to use his influence."

"But how is that to be done?"

"We must deceive him; for he is violent against the union of *Chastain* and your sister, and declares that it shall not be considered binding. If he believed that *Irene's* release might lead to making her mine, he would take her under his own protection again; once in the chateau, I could manage an elopement from there, and see you both safe beyond the frontiers. Do you think that *Irene* can be induced to lend herself to such a deception?"

"She must: there is no other feasible plan by which we can release her. I can not sufficiently thank you for your offered aid, Delmont, and I accept it as readily as I would have granted it had our positions been reversed."

They grasped each other's hands firmly, and then proceeded to arrange the minute details of their plan. By the time this was done, twilight had fallen, and the stars began to gleam from the clear sky above. The mellow winding of a horn came through the still depths of the forest, and Delmont arose as he said,

"That is *Ammonet's* signal for supper. Let us proceed to the cottage, and I will send him to attend to the wants of your horse."

Gerauld followed him through the desolate court-yard, filled with broken fragments of the old house, and his heart sadly yearned over these ruined memorials of his early home. But he resolutely repressed the grief that would have unmanned him; for action lay before him, and he must not

linger over the sorrows of his heart, or those that were dear to him would be lost to him forever.

The pathway wound through the forest, over an undulating country, and after a rapid walk of half a mile they stood in front of the cottage—a small, unpretending building, shaded by a group of trees. A bright fire blazed on the hearth within, which was welcome, for the air of evening was chilly: in front of it Ammonet had set out his table with the best his larder afforded. The traveler did justice to these preparations, for, in spite of the uneasiness of his mind, the exercise of the day had given him a keen appetite.

A soldier's pallet afforded him the rest he greatly needed, and Lefevre slept soundly until the sunbeams, glancing into the cottage, warned him that it was time to arise and commence the labors of the day. After dispatching their morning meal, the two young officers set out on their mission to the Chateau de Montour.

The morning was brilliantly clear, and but for the weight upon the heart of Lefevre, the ride would have been a pleasure; for a portion of the road wound through a most picturesque part of the mountain scenery, and the elastic air of a cool November morning gave vigor to the muscles, and a quicker motion to the blood of the two equestrians. They talked of what most deeply interested themselves: each found in the other much to appreciate, and the bond of union so lately formed was drawn closer by every hour of association.

They reached the chateau, and were received by a domestic clad in deep mourning. They were ushered into the usual sitting-room of M. de Montour, which was heavily draped with black cloth, that produced a most sombre effect. The chair which Bertha had usually occupied was elevated on a small platform; over this a canopy was erected, from which long folds of black crape swept to the floor. Cypress and ground ivy were twined over it; and on the cushion lay her Prayer-book, supporting a crucifix, exquisitely sculp-

tured. Over the back of the seat hung a crown of immortelles, and within its circle was a small picture of Bertha, painted by a skillful Italian artist, in which she was represented as St. Cecilia.

This had been executed several years before; and now the bereaved father found happiness in thus deifying this little image of her who had been so dear to him. All together the apartment produced a most gloomy and depressing effect on the young men. Delmont sent in his own name, but merely added that he was accompanied by a gentleman who wished earnestly to see the *Sieur de Montour* on family affairs of importance.

A formal message came back to him that Captain Delmont was always a welcome guest, but the visit of a stranger at such a time, under any pretext whatever, must be declined. Delmont whispered,

"I will see him, and tell him who you really are. Then, perhaps, he will consent to receive you."

He followed the attendant into an adjoining apartment, which was draped in the same funereal garb; the windows were closed to exclude the light of the cheerful sun, and a screen was placed between the smouldering fire and the unhappy occupant of the room; for, in the deep gloom of his soul, he could not bear the sight of any thing bright. Wasted, feeble, and broken down, *M. de Montour* sat crouching in a large chair, with his head bowed upon his hands—a most complete picture of wretchedness and hopelessness. As Delmont entered the room, the chaplain arose from his side, looking bewildered and distressed; for there was too little in common between these two natures to give the priest the power to console the overwhelming grief that consumed the old man's life.

The visitor took the seat vacated by him, and he left the apartment, glad to be released from the sombre gloom that oppressed him like an incubus. *M. de Montour* was the first to speak.

"My young friend," he said, "you do not forsake the

stricken in their affliction. I am grateful that you have not forgotten me; though it can now be but little pleasure to any one to come to the house of mourning, over which no sun may ever again arise."

Delmont pressed the hand he offered him, and the old man went on:

"I mourn as did David over the death of Absalom; but it is only over my individual loss, for my daughter is among the blessed; for only last night I saw her in a vision with her right hand clasped in that of the blessed Virgin; and as she held it aloft, that I might see how miraculously it had been restored, rays of divine glory seemed to stream from it. Their brightness penetrated my soul and consoled me. I am willing to give her up to such companionship; but oh! I am very desolate without her."

"Will it not be well to recall your niece?" suggested Delmont; "she could perhaps fill the place of your daughter, in some measure."

He looked up almost fiercely, and said,

"No one shall ever do that. I have no such desire; and my heretical niece is the last to whom I would give *her* place in my heart. No—Irene is best where she is: let her remain there until she learns the true will of God toward her."

"Yet, my dear monsieur, if Irene will consent to think of a future union between her and myself, will you not relent? I am unwilling that one who may become my future wife shall be held in durance by that Church to which I belong. It may only prejudice her more deeply against it."

"Ah! if she will consent to *that*, I may be more lenient," replied the uncle, with a slight appearance of interest. "If Irene consents to accept you, I may even think of your request to intercede for the life of the inferior person she calls her husband. I will only have him banished to Canada, where she shall never hear from him again."

"I believe that Mademoiselle Lefevre will now be dis-

posed to listen more favorably to my proposals, especially as her brother has returned, and we have already become fast friends."

"What! my nephew, Gerauld? And is not he, too, a stiff-necked heretic? What induces him to join hands with you, above all men, when he must know that you hold the lands he once expected to inherit?"

"We have equitably settled all that; for I never intended to claim the estate without purchasing the right from the lawful heir at something like its true value. Colonel Lefevre and I have come to a good understanding, and I have induced him to accompany me hither, that you may concede to him the freedom of his sister."

"That he may take her fate in his own hands—cozen you of your bride, and me of my niece;" and his old sneer appeared on his lip. "What can you expect of this generation of unbelievers in Holy Mother Church but just such a proceeding as that?"

"Let the future prove itself," replied Delmont, quietly. "I am willing to trust Colonel Lefevre; and as I am the party most deeply interested, I believe you will not refuse to grant me what I ask. Bring Irene back to the chateau, that I may have free access to her society, to plead my own cause—that is all I ask; and I am sure that my wishes will be accomplished much sooner than by keeping her secluded in the convent."

M. de Montour listened in evident surprise to the tone of conviction with which the young man spoke. After a few moments' reflection, he said,

"I will concede to you what you ask; but of my nephew I know nothing that pleases me, except that he has served the king's cause with gallantry. He is of the blood of the Lefevres, and that is sufficient; for they are a strong-willed and heretical race; and dark was the hour when, in the inexperience of youth, I gave the hand of friendship to one of them."

"My dear friend, bury these old animosities, I beg; and,

as a personal favor to myself, grant an interview to Colonel Lefevre. He wishes to see you."

"That he may proclaim himself the next heir to my estate, now my child is gone?" asked M. de Montour, almost fiercely. "I would sooner see it sunk into the ocean, or swallowed up in the flames of purgatory, than in the possession of one of his detested name."

Delmont was shocked at this outburst. He said,

"You can not really suspect your nephew of such a thought. A man who, by adherence to his religious belief, is virtually deprived of his own inheritance, will scarcely think of putting forward claims to that of another. See Colonel Lefevre, and you will no longer suspect him of any sinister motive in calling on you."

M. de Montour waved his hand impatiently, and said,

"Bring him in then, that the meeting may be over as soon as possible; for it must be painful to me to see him."

Ungracious as this permission was, Delmont hastened to avail himself of it. In a few moments he returned, accompanied by Gerauld, who looked with sympathy and interest on the tall figure that arose to receive him with all the hauteur of a grand seigneur to whom a vassal had come to prefer a distasteful request.

In spite of his prejudices, the graceful and dignified bearing of Lefevre impressed his uncle favorably; and when he looked in his face for a few brief moments, he was carried back to those days when distrust nor hardness had left their stern imprint upon his youthful soul; for he could almost have believed that the friend of his earlier days stood before him. But in another instant the revulsion came, and he felt only more stern and immovable from his own consciousness of the passing weakness.

His nephew approached him, and would have offered his hand, but the old man sternly waved him aside, and sinking, as if exhausted, into his seat, said, in his coldest tone,

"I have consented to receive you, Colonel Lefevre, at the earnest request of your friend, Captain Delmont; and now,

if you have any thing of importance to say to me, I wish it as briefly stated as may be."

The young officer replied with dignity,

"I came, monsieur, in the hope that I might enlist your feelings in behalf of my sister and my friend; that the former may be released from her confinement in the convent; the latter saved from a fate greatly disproportioned to his offense."

While he spoke, the Sieur de Montour regarded him severely, and his cold eyes gleamed fiercely at the allusion to Chastain.

"Your sister," he replied, "will be released on the terms I have made known to Captain Delmont. As to Chastain, if I interfere in his behalf, it will not be because I believe him undeserving the punishment decreed to him; on the contrary, I hold him, and all like him, guilty of the unpardonable sin in rebelling against the divine authority on earth to which Christ himself gave a visible head. If Irene will give Chastain up; if she will consent to unite her fate with that of the man I have chosen for her; then, I repeat it, I will make an effort to save him."

"And only on those terms, monsieur? My sister is already united in holy bonds to the prisoner."

"Let them be broken, then. I attach no sacredness to such a tie as binds her to Claude Chastain. I have spoken; now I wish to be alone."

He waved his hand peremptorily, and thus unceremoniously dismissed, the two young men bowed respectfully and left the apartment. As they rode from the chateau, they met the Abbot of the Dominicans, accompanied by the other monks, near its entrance. After they had passed them, Delmont said,

"There is the man in whose hands the fate of Chastain lies. He is mercenary, as well as cruel; and the request of the Sieur de Montour just now, when he is laboring to secure his fortune, will have more weight than a petition from any other quarter. Father Antoine has seen you,

Lefevre; he will soon learn who you are, and your object in coming hither; therefore you had better be on your guard."

"I have no cause to fear him; my position in the army of the king should be a sufficient protection even against priestly enmity."

"Nothing is a protection against it, my friend. They rule every thing, and if you are suspected of any intention to claim your sister, and remove her from their authority, you would not be an instant safe from their machinations; though they might be secretly used against you."

"My dear Delmont, you speak with strange freedom of the ministers of your own faith."

"I speak of a set of corrupt, avaricious, and cruel priests, who debase the office they hold, and commit acts in the name of Christ over which fiends in the Inferno might weep. The faith my mother taught me was not such as theirs; and I scorn and repudiate the claims of such men to any religion whatever. They are only instruments of ecclesiastical ambition, taught to consider every thing that upholds the authority of the Church as right. I detest their hypocrisy, and loathe their want of principle; but the unfaithfulness of her ministers does not destroy the claims of the Church itself to consideration; for bad men, unfortunately, may be found every where. Let us not argue on this subject, for it is one on which we can never agree."

Lefevre respected the honest convictions of another, even if they were founded in error, and he changed the subject by inquiring,

"How shall I gain access to Irene, to induce her to enter into our plan?"

"I think it will be best to go at once to the convent, and ask permission to see her. I have called several times to inquire after Irene, though I have never asked for an interview with her. My presence with you will be sufficient warrant to the abbess that you are really her brother. I will write a few lines to her, and send them by the portress,

and I trust they will have the effect of bringing Mademoiselle Lefevre to the grating; then I will contrive to keep the attention of the old woman engaged while you confide to her our plans."

"Very good, if we can only succeed."

"We can at least make the attempt; and it is so much gained that Father Antoine is otherwise engaged, and can not be there to interfere."

They put spurs to their steeds, and rode rapidly toward the convent. The heart of Gerault filled with a thousand tender and rebellious feelings as he approached the walls which contained the being he loved with all the strength of his soul, preparing to immolate herself on the altar of fanaticism, while he felt himself powerless to rescue her from the fate she was so blindly embracing.

CHAPTER XXV.

IRENE was again convalescent; the soothing presence of her gentle and beloved friend restored her mind to a calmer tone; and the assurances of Eugenia that she believed her influence with Father Antoine would be powerful enough to rescue Chastain from his approaching doom, gave her fortitude to bear the terrible uncertainty in which she lived as to the fate of all that were dearest to her. As she recovered strength, the nuns endeavored to interest her in their employments; but she turned with a sick heart from the employments that served to wile away the monotony of their lives. To her sad soul music sounded as a wail over all she had loved and lost; for painting she had little talent, and their books of devotion wearied and often revolted her. Those which were read for amusement were sedulously kept out of sight of both herself and Eugenia; for the Protestant prejudices of both of them would have been shocked at the character of the literature furtively introduced into the house professedly devoted to the worship of God.

Wearied of the inactivity in which she lived, with her mind preying on itself for lack of something to occupy it, Irene finally asked leave of the superior to take part in the instruction in the large school attached to the establishment. She had seen the children assembled together, and, although she had not been permitted to speak with them, they had deeply interested her feelings. Irene well knew the history of these little unfortunates, and her heart beat warmly toward them.

The school was principally made up of children from seven to twelve years of age, many of whom had been forcibly torn from Huguenot parents, and placed there for re-

ligious training; and how many aching little hearts were imprisoned there, the young girl could well divine. At first the superior hesitated as to the propriety of granting her request. Irene might learn too much of their internal policy; but, on the other hand, as a Protestant, she probably imagined the suffering greater than it really was, and something might be gained by permitting her to see the reality. That the daughter of Lefevre would ever at heart become a proselyte, the superior had no hope; and she had settled in her own mind that Irene would eventually choose between the cloister and the hand of Delmont, and find the latter, with a nominal adhesion to the dominant Church, preferable to imprisonment in a convent.

Mademoiselle Lefevre was permitted to descend to the lower rooms of the building, and volunteer her assistance as a teacher; but when Eugenia asked for the same liberty, it was denied to her until after she had irrevocably taken the vows. Then, she was assured, she might make herself useful in any manner that suited her own inclinations. Irene very well understood why this distinction was made, but she dared not enlighten her friend. It was now too late to save Eugenia; she had chosen her own path, and must walk unfalteringly in it, and hers should not be the hand to tear away the veil which concealed the revolting deceptions that surrounded her. Too soon they must become known to her—too soon destroy the peaceful illusion in which she lived.

When Irene for the first time entered the long room in which the children were assembled, they were engaged with their morning lessons, and she had an opportunity to observe the various faces that bent wearily over their tasks. A hundred girls were crowded into an apartment scarcely large enough to accommodate fifty in comfort; and to one who had not beheld them it would have seemed impossible that childish faces could express such deep despondency. At the instigation of the priests, many of them had formally abjured Protestantism at an age when they could not be

competent to understand the nature of the act, and the infamous laws made for the occasion thus deprived the parents of all future power over the fate of the child: it was immediately removed from their influence, and placed among the Papists for instruction.

Others, without any such ceremony, were torn from the domestic hearth, where tenderness and never-ceasing watchfulness were developing the fairest traits of character, to be thrown among this promiscuous crowd, with no heart on which to lean, no maternal voice to soothe the sorrows of childhood, that they might be taught to bow down in reverence before idols, and to believe that the Virgin Mary is all-powerful as an intercessor, when we have been expressly told that in the name of Christ *alone* shall forgiveness be asked.

Mademoiselle Lefevre was not permitted to impart religious instruction at all; but her proffered services to assist in teaching the younger girls to read were gratefully accepted by the nuns in charge of them. They were taught sufficient to enable them to understand the lives of the saints, and to do a little light needle-work: that was all toward educating these immortal souls that was accomplished.

Among the children, one pale, feeble little creature particularly interested Irene. She was really over seven years of age, but extreme delicacy of organization had retarded her growth, and she seemed not more than six; her face had such an innocent and childlike expression, that it made Irene's heart ache to think of the mother from whom she had been torn. When the turn of this child came to recite, she found that she was farther advanced than the most of the other children of her years; she read with intelligent and correct emphasis, which showed that she had been carefully instructed.

Irene passed her hands over the short, silky curls, which she could well imagine had once been the pride of her mother's heart, and said,

"You have done very well, my little child. Tell me your name, and who taught such a *mignonne* as you how to read so prettily."

Tears started in the large, dark eyes of the child, and, in a subdued tone, she replied,

"My mother taught me, mademoiselle. My name is Adèle Bernard, and I have only been here two weeks; but oh! I want to see my mother and my little sister so much!"

There was something irresistibly touching in the manner of the child, and Irene took her in her arms and questioned her gently, until all her sad history was told and the little overburdened heart soothed by the evident sympathy that was bestowed upon her. The superintendent approached, and Irene said to her,

"Surely this is a very young child to be separated from her parents."

"The end to be attained justifies the means," she replied; "and Adèle is not so young as she seems. She has not been here long enough to become reconciled yet. They nearly all pine at first; but they soon become used to staying here, and gradually forget their early associations."

Irene looked around, and saw on the faces of the elder pupils an expression of dull indifference, but not of happiness or childish thoughtlessness; all wore an air of premature care. "And this outrage against their helplessness was practiced that they may receive instruction in a faith which has repudiated the prominent truths of the Gospel, and does not even demand purity of life of its followers as a condition of salvation," was the thought that passed through her mind.

On farther acquaintance with them, some of the elder ones boasted that they had preferred the true Church to remaining with their parents, and spoke, as they were taught to think, as if they had done something meritorious in the sight of Heaven which entitled them to a reward. Yet nearly all—even the most callous—who had parents yearned to be with them once more. They were not unkindly

treated; but those who had been accustomed to the union and affectionate interests of the family circle keenly felt its loss; and there was little hope that these young natures would be benefited by the violent measures taken to insure their adherence to the Church.

A few days after Irene made the acquaintance of the little Adèle, she grew ill, and was soon confined to her bed. She had fever, doubtless brought on by that sickness of heart, from which, child as she was, she evidently suffered deeply. Irene gave up her voluntary labors in the school-room to attend to the helpless being thus mercilessly cast on the kindness of strangers, when hearts were breaking over her loss.

In a long dormitory, filled with narrow beds, with barely space enough to pass between them, she found the child restlessly tossing on her pillow, and calling, in tones of tender pathos, on her mother's name.

"Oh, mother! I am so lonely. Mother, come! mother! mother!" and the fond name was repeated with every intonation of entreaty, until the voice sunk, from weakness, into silence. Irene bent over her, and placing her hand upon her brow, found it burning with fever.

"Poor little creature!" she murmured. "The All Father will soon take you to himself, where the sad cry of your heart shall be hushed. But what can console those from whom you have been torn only to find a grave?"

She bathed the child's forehead, and moistened her parched lips. Adèle unclosed her dim eyes, and an expression of rapture beamed over her face as she stretched out her arms and said,

"Mother! dear mother, you have come at last."

"No; my darling child, not your mother, but one who loves you, and will try to make you well again," replied the young girl, gently.

A look of keen disappointment stole over the features of the little girl, and she turned her face toward the pillow and wept bitterly. Suddenly she seemed to remember who

was beside her, and she brushed away her tears, and, turning toward her, said,

"I thought it was my own mother; and when I found it was not, I could not help crying; but I am very glad to see you, too, mademoiselle, for you have been very good to me."

Irene bent over her, and tenderly kissed her flushed cheek.

"Be quiet now, my love, and try and sleep; it will do you good."

"I wish I could sleep, and never wake at all," she replied; "for when I am asleep I see my father and mother, and my pretty little sister, in my dreams. Do you think, mademoiselle, that, if I am a very good girl, the nuns will let me ever go back to them? I was so happy at home, and here I am so miserable. Oh! if they could only know how much I want to go back, they would let me go, I am sure."

"Wait till you get well again," replied Irene, soothingly, "and then we will see about it."

Adèle sighed heavily, and turned her face away; but the sympathetic watcher saw that tears slowly forced themselves between the closed eyelids, and rolled over her flushed cheeks, even after her heavy breathing gave the assurance that she slept.

An elderly nun, who filled the office of head-nurse to the children, came to inquire after the patient. She was an humble and depressed-looking being, and Irene wondered what her experience had been in the life to which she had devoted herself. She examined the condition of the child, and then, with a heavy sigh, sat down on a neighboring bed.

"Do you not think her very ill?" asked Irene.

"That is easy enough to see, mademoiselle. She is threatened with brain fever, and when children of her delicate make have it, they never recover. She'll go like others that have been brought here, and there's no help for her."

There was deep despondency in the tone of the old woman, and Irene's heart sunk as she looked upon the little girl and acknowledged the truth of her words.

"Do many die in this way?" she asked.

"More than the superior would like to report. The poor things are dragged away from all they love; and then the life they live here is not the best for a child—at least they don't seem to thrive under it, although they have time enough to play. Some have more feeling than others, like this poor thing here; and such children nearly all pine away and die in the end."

"But when they find the child can not live, will not the parents be informed, that they may at least see her once more?"

The nun shook her head:

"Why should they? They wouldn't be allowed to take her home and nurse her well again. She'll die, and maybe they won't know it for months or years, maybe never; for the inquiries of the Huguenots about their children that are brought here are never answered."

"But is this right? Can it be right?"

"I don't know: the father confessor says it must be so, and what he says we are bound to do. If it's wrong, he will have the burden to bear before the Virgin and the saints, and not we who obey him."

Here was expressed the true Romish spirit—submission to authority without reflecting on individual responsibility; and Irene turned despondently toward the helpless little victim who was to be the next sacrifice to this great Juggernaut, which for centuries had rolled upon its ruthless course as recklessly as did the car of the Pagan idol bearing with it the cries and groans of martyred thousands.

"What shall we do for the child?" asked Irene.

The nun made a prescription from her simple pharmacopœia, and then said,

"If she grows worse, we must send to the Dominican monastery for one of the brothers, who is a skillful leech.

He may be able to do something; but I am afraid the case is a bad one."

Irene engaged to apply her remedies, and the sick child was left to her care. In spite of all her efforts to alleviate her sufferings, she grew rapidly worse, and by nightfall was raving in a paroxysm of brain fever. The monk was summoned, but pronounced the case a hopeless one. He directed some trifling remedies that might allay the delirium, and then left with the assurance that within twenty-four hours the young life they had destroyed would carry its sad tale of wrong to Him who said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven."

As night approached, the little sufferer was removed to the sick ward; and Irene watched beside her through the long hours of darkness. In her delirium, she again fancied the fair face that bent above her to be her mother's, and words of fond endearment came from her lips. Her nurse encouraged the happy delusion, and she prattled on of the home she would never again behold, until that long sleep of exhaustion which only ends in dissolution bound her failing senses.

The struggle had been a brief one, for there was no strength to resist the approaches of the shining angel; and as Irene prayed for the departing spirit, she felt that his presence was a blessing to this helpless little one. But, ah! what consolation could be afforded to the bereaved parents, to whom the fate of their beloved one must remain "a doubt and anguish, a despair," through long years, perhaps through life? The old nun had spoken the truth: the child's death would never be made known to them; for the priests well knew that it would be a consolation to know that she was safe with Him in whose precepts they believed, rather than in their power.

Soon after day dawned, the nun came in to look after the sick child: her head was supported in the arms of Irene, and the sunken features and feeble respiration told their own sad tale.

"Ah!" said she, "I thought this would be the end; but I did not think she would go quite so soon. Let me place her on the bed, mademoiselle; she will lie just as easy there, and you look nearly worn out."

"No," replied Irene. "She believed her mother was beside her, and, in her absence, I will endeavor to fill her place. Let her die in my arms, and may her sinless spirit bear to heaven a petition for one who, like herself, is far from all that once made life precious to her."

The old woman regarded the two compassionately; but she made no reply. Life to her had long been a round of monotonous duties, performed with mechanical precision; for which, in a future state, she hoped to receive a reward proportioned to their want of interest here. She left the apartment to summon the priest to administer the last rites to the dying. He came, and hurried through them with disgraceful haste, though he was careful to have the child removed from contact with her heretical friend while they proceeded.

The hours passed slowly on, and with them the faint indications of life in the dying child grew momentarily more feeble, until they altogether ceased. Irene gently laid the still form upon the couch. She was exhausted by her long vigils, and left the remaining duties to be performed by the nuns, while she sought her own apartment, and threw herself upon the bed to gain a few hours of repose.

From this she was aroused by a message from the superior, who desired to see her in her private room. Hastily arranging her disordered dress, she proceeded at once to obey the summons. She found the lady alone, holding in her hand a note, evidently very hurriedly written. She did not invite Irene to be seated, but said at once,

"Here are two gentlemen at the grate who desire an interview with you, mademoiselle; and although I do not often grant such a favor, I shall concede this to you. You are at liberty to converse with them."

"Who are they?" asked Irene, deeply excited at this announcement.

"The writer of this note is Captain Delmont; and as your uncle has expressed a wish that he shall sometimes see you, I shall permit it on this occasion."

Irene's heart sunk, and she asked,

"Who, then, is his companion?"

"One you will gladly welcome, mademoiselle; and when you learn who it is you are about to meet, you will not think our rule altogether one of iron. Your brother waits to see you at the grate, and you have my permission to meet him."

Irene did not need a second permission. Scarcely pausing to thank the superior, she left the room with steps winged by excitement, and flew through the corridors, until she reached the passage leading to the entrance. The portress was on guard as usual, and standing in the light, beyond the gloomy prison bars that held her captive, were two gentlemen. One of them stood back a little, and she appreciated the delicacy of Captain Delmont in thus withdrawing from the vicinity of her brother and herself in the first moments of their meeting.

The grating was barely wide enough to permit their hands to pass through; and sweet was it to Irene to feel the grasp of brotherly affection once more. They gazed on each other with moistened eyes, and, after the first deep emotion was over, Irene murmured,

"Oh, Gerauld! where is our father? Have you seen him? Can you tell me any thing of him?"

"I trust and believe he has escaped. Such information as I have been able to obtain leads me to that conclusion; but I shall make farther inquiries, and endeavor to gain a clew to the spot that affords him an asylum. My darling sister, you have suffered deeply; but now, I trust, a brighter hour is coming for us all."

"Brighter! Oh, brother! do you know that Claude, my own Claude, is condemned to die—to be burned? that he must perish, because he will not recant?" and an expression of wild anguish swept over her face that alarmed him for her sanity.

Lefevre glanced around, and saw that Delmont, as he promised, had engaged the nun in conversation. He bent his head, and spoke in a guarded tone:

"Hope for the best, Irene; only lend yourself to the plans of Delmont and myself, and we will rescue both you and Claude."

"What are they?" she asked, with feverish interest. "Only save him—save him, brother! and I care little what becomes of myself."

"Irene," he impressively asked, "can you not trust implicitly to the honor of Delmont?"

"I have good cause to know that I can," she replied; "but remember that he loves me, Gerauld, and do not ask too much of his noble nature. I can never be sufficiently grateful to Captain Delmont for his conduct toward me while I was in the house of my uncle. Though designedly thrown with me day after day, when he became convinced that I could not return his affection, he acted with such delicacy and tact as to screen me from the fierce anger of the *Sieur de Montour*. To him I owe the little forbearance that was shown to me there."

"I thank you, my dear girl, for this testimony to his worth; I can now trust him as implicitly as my heart prompted me from the first to do. Irene, if you will consent to receive the addresses of Delmont, our uncle promises that the fate of Chastain shall be changed to exile for life. Cruelty must be met by craft, and there is nothing left for us now but to accept his terms. You will then be recalled to the chateau, and in the certainty that you will soon become the bride of Delmont, more liberty will be granted you. I shall remain quietly in the neighborhood of Nismes, and when our plans for an elopement are matured, our noble friend will see us safe beyond the frontiers. Have no scruples with regard to Delmont, for he is aware that, in effecting your escape, it is as the bride of another."

"He knows, then, how near Claude is to me? Oh, Gerauld! if he is saved from the fate that threatens him, whith-

er will he be sent? Can I not go with him in his exile? I care not for privations; only let me cling to his side."

"My dear sister, that will be impossible; for, if spared, Chastain will inevitably be sent to Canada, whence he must manage to escape and join us in Virginia, whither my steps will be turned when once we are out of this oppressed land."

Irene stood with bowed head, and her lips moved a few moments; then she looked up, and spoke gently and firmly:

"Brother, I submit to the will of Heaven. It may be years before Claude and myself meet again, but I firmly believe that, even on earth, we shall be reunited. In this hope I will live on, and struggle for help to bear the burden laid on me. See him, Gerauld—tell him that I will be true to him throughout all the years of my life. I will look forward to our reunion in heaven, if on earth it may never be."

"I will tell him your exact words, my dear sister; and in future years, when we look back to this sad hour, when seated in security beneath our own roof tree in the land we will cause to blossom with plenty, that assurance will be a dear and precious memory to the heart of him you have so truly blessed with your love. Oh! if one heart had for me cherished such affection, I should not now bear with me this load of anguish and disappointment, more difficult to endure than even our wrecked fortunes."

"Poor brother!" said Irene, tenderly, "Eugenia does not comprehend the severity of the blow she has inflicted on you, or she would have paused before consenting to become a nun."

"How is she, Irene? How does she look?" asked the lover. "I would risk my life to see her, if only for a moment; yet I know it is madness to desire it. Is she, can she be, happy in the prospect before her?"

"She appears so; and she steadfastly refuses to listen to any thing that may disturb her peaceful trust in the future. In a few more days she takes the veil, and on that occasion you may behold her for the last time."

"Yes; I may gaze on her, clad in the mockery of bridal robes, at the burial of hope, love, and life. My poor Eugenia! I feel that she is giving herself up to future remorse, and utter weariness of life, in the miserable seclusion which shuts her out from human sympathy, and may in time render her as hard and fanatical as our uncle himself."

"No, Gerauld, Eugenia will never become that. The tenderness of her nature may make her a martyr to the cause she believes to be right; but truth, love, and conscientiousness will always be the rules of her life."

"I believe that, Irene, and yet I must lose her—must relinquish her to the direful influence of the priests. That is the bitterness of the trial; and if her father is permitted to look down and behold the results of his want of firmness in training her in his own faith, bitter must be his punishment."

"My brother, let the dead rest in peace; doubtless M. Altenberg believed he was acting for the best. I see the portress is becoming impatient, and we must end even this unsatisfactory interview. When can we meet again?"

"That depends on our uncle. When he reclaims you, Delmont will again bring us together. Adieu, dear Irene; I will, if possible, see Claude. I must send a greeting to Eugenia. Tell her that my life is desolate; but hers, I trust, will be as happy as she hopes to find it in the future."

He tenderly pressed her hand to his lips, and Captain Delmont approached. He said,

"The portress tells me that we have staid to the utmost limit of our time. Mademoiselle, your brother has explained all: can you trust me?"

"I can—I do," replied Irene, with tremulous sweetness; "and I thank you more than words can express."

"And I, Irene, will endeavor to find happiness in saving him you love."

He bowed low before her, and the heavy door swung to: the young girl, with a lightened, but still a very sad heart, went slowly to her room. She found Eugenia there awaiting her; as Irene entered, she said,

"I learned just now that your little patient is dead, and I came to console you; for truly the poor child seemed to have wound herself into your heart, even in the few days you have known her."

"Sweet little angel! she is at rest, and I do not regret it. I should rather have needed consolation if I had remembered her poor, wistful face after I leave; for Adèle would never have been happy here."

"Leave!" repeated Eugenia. "Is there any chance of that, Irene?" and she grew slightly pale as she asked the question.

"There is, Eugenia. My brother has returned; my uncle will again receive me at the chateau, and I shall probably be summoned to leave you in a few more hours."

The novice sunk on a seat and covered her face with her hands, while her frame shook with emotion she vainly endeavored to repress. Irene drew near, and sat down beside her.

"Eugenia," she softly said, "my brother loves you still; he bids me say—"

"Stop! stay!" exclaimed Eugenia, with suddenly assumed composure. "It is not fitting that the affianced bride of Christ should listen to such words from any mortal lover. My grief is caused by parting from you, Irene; but when old ties and old associations begin to renew their influence over me, it is time that we should go on our widely severed paths. The life that is dedicated to Heaven should permit no earthly feeling of affection to mar its singleness of purpose."

"And must the living, beating heart be crushed down until it responds to no emotion of feeling before it is a fitting offering at the shrine of Him who uttered the injunction 'love one another?' Oh! my friend, my heart bleeds over the illusion from which you will one day be aroused, and find that in place of a living and vital faith you have embraced only the dust and ashes of a dead paganism, clothed, like the apples of Sodom, with a beauty that only veils the rottenness within."

Eugenia regarded her with an expression of horror.

"This from you, Irene! It is blasphemy! it is sacrilege, thus to speak of the Universal Mother, from whose great heart has flowed all the light the world has known."

"And you really believe this, my poor, benighted one? I thought that the truths of History and Revelation had taught you a better lesson; for you have been instructed in them by one who had over you the influence both of authority and affection."

Eugenia understood the allusion, and she replied,

"My father could not himself have been entirely convinced, or he would not have permitted his only child to be educated in a different belief. That fact has had great weight with me in determining the course I have pursued. Had he been certain he was in the right path, he would not have suffered me to depart from it. Say no more, Irene—it is only cruel;" and she looked so pale and distressed that her friend felt self-condemned for having wounded her; though she felt that she was only performing an imperative duty in what she believed to be their last hours of communion on earth.

In the mean time, Lefevre and Delmont returned to Nismes, and made many strenuous efforts to gain an interview with Claude Chastain; but all their attempts proved fruitless. The prisoners were to be executed on the morrow, and all access to them was positively forbidden.

Late in the evening, worn out with the exertions and disappointments of the day, they returned to the cottage in the dell, to seek such repose as might be found in contemplation of the outrage to be consummated on the following morning. Lefevre had made such inquiries as were possible concerning the fate of his father; and all the information he could glean tended to confirm him in the belief that he had escaped to the sea-coast, and by this time was probably safe upon some foreign shore.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE following morning was ushered in with one of the most terrific storms that had for years swept over the province of Languedoc. Late in the season as it was, thunder rattled from peak to peak of the mountains, and their lofty summits often seemed veiled in sheets of living flame from the angry heavens above.

For two hours the strife of the elements continued, and the superstitious looked on with trembling awe, in the belief that the visible judgment of Heaven was about to visit their city as a punishment for the terrible sacrifice that was to be consummated there on that day. But the fury of the storm expended itself among the mountains. In the town of Nismes but one building was injured, and that injury was interpreted by the Huguenots as a signal rebuke to their enemies.

Over the door of the Cathedral a shaft of marble was inserted, which bore on it the words,

“THE TRUE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD.”

This was rent in twain, and the inscription so shattered as to be no longer legible. When informed of the accident, the abbot sneeringly remarked,

“The heretics will interpret this into a judgment, and a refutation of our claim to be the only true fold. But even if Nature does repudiate it, they shall not do so with impunity.”

He gave orders for the instant removal of the ruins, and before the day closed in a new shaft, with the same inscription, replaced the old one.

Gradually the clouds rolled away; the sun broke forth bright and warm, and, with recovered spirits, the inhabit-

ants prepared to witness the spectacle of the *auto da fé* with feelings as widely different as were their religious prejudices. The ceremonies of the day commenced by the tolling of all the bells in town; and the lugubrious peal was never for one moment slackened until darkness veiled the place in a gloom scarcely as deep as the religious night which prevailed there.

The military, in full uniform, were accompanied by bands, stationed at intervals in the procession, playing dirges of a mournful character as they marched slowly toward the public square. Then came the clergy in full canonicals, attended by a choir of singers, who chanted the service for the dead as they proceeded through the crowded streets—for on that day every one forsook his calling to witness the execution of three men, convicted of no crime save a desire to worship God in a purer spirit than that taught by the Church of Rome. .

The procession paused in front of the Cathedral, and the three prisoners were brought forth with bare feet, and clothed in the dress of the condemned. Thus far Chastain had received no intimation that a gleam of hope existed that his fate was not as certainly decided as that of his companions. He looked pale and worn with suffering, but he was calm and firm in the contemplation of the fiery ordeal before him.

Laval, sustained, as ever, by the strength of his faith, looked with burning eyes upon the crowd that hemmed them in—some exulting over, others pitying the unfortunate victims of religious fanaticism. Gaunt, wild, and wretched, he raised his voice at intervals, and interrupted the chanting of the priests by uttering the terrible denunciations of Scripture against the persecutors of the faithful; nor could all the efforts of the priests stop him. In this last hour he would be heard.

But the most touching spectacle was the venerable form of M. Lecroix. Although verging toward his seventieth year, his age, his piety, nor his heavenly patience under torture, had moved his cruel tormentors. As one who had

long defied them—who had exposed the base corruptions and heathen blindness of the Church, which, to the priesthood, is of more importance than God himself, the pastor of the desert was peculiarly obnoxious; and when they found him in their power, they ruthlessly wreaked their vengeance on his feeble and worn-out body. His limbs were racked until his joints were dislocated; in that condition he had been subjected to the most awful of all punishments—breaking on the wheel; and now, a helpless mass of physical agony, he lay upon the hurdle on which they had placed him, his mangled form covered with the condemned robes, and his silvery locks stained with blood from his own wounds. Life yet beat in his suffering body; and, lest it should escape, and the last ordeal be unfelt, a priest, skilled in medicine, was beside him, who at intervals forced a stimulant between his locked and rigid lips.

A priest walked on each side of the other prisoners, exhorting them to redeem their lives by recantation, which, even at this hour, would be listened to. During the whole of their imprisonment, threats, promises, and importunities had alternately been used to shake their firmness; and to Chastain especially every inducement had been held out which could be supposed capable of moving him.

Life, love, and happiness were again and again offered him as the reward of concession, and often his soul was sorely shaken within him; but a strength he scarcely comprehended was given him to spurn the temptation, and remain true to the belief he had embraced from the sincere convictions of his mind. He had requested permission to write a few lines to Irene before being led to his fate; but, exasperated at his firmness, the privilege had been refused him.

Slowly the melancholy cortège advanced, sending forth a wild *miserere* as it went, accompanied by the dull reverberation of innumerable feet as the crowd poured toward the central square, where the funereal pyre had been erected beneath the walls of an ancient Roman amphitheatre, in which had formerly perished the Christian martyr, torn by

wild beasts, amidst the exulting shouts of thousands of spectators. It was a fitting spot on which to re-enact those barbarous scenes. The actors were only changed: then it was the pagan who hurled the Christian to the hungry lion; now it was the Christian himself warring against his brother, and destroying him in the name of the God they both professed to worship: and those old walls looked down, a silent witness of both—a monument to the inconsistency and blind zeal of man.

Chastain, as he moved forward, looked around to see if a friendly face would beam on him from the crowd in his present desolate condition. Many a silent and sympathetic greeting came to him, not only from those who believed with him, but from many who were faithful adherents of the Church from which he was punished for seceding. At length his eye fell on a face he had not hoped to behold again on earth; for he was not aware of the return of Gerould Lefevre, and, as their eyes met, his heart beat wildly with the thoughts that crowded in a tumult through his brain. Lefevre made a sign to him, which he did not comprehend, for it intimated hope, and that gentle light had faded so utterly from his mind, that it was difficult to relume it again.

They reached the fatal spot. An immense funereal pyre, with three stakes rising from the centre, occupied the open space in front of the amphitheatre. The hurdle was brought forward, on which the shattered form of the pastor of the desert was placed, and the priests made a last appeal to him to enter the Church, and thus save his soul from everlasting perdition. He comprehended the insulting mockery to which he was subjected in his feeble and dying condition. Exerting all his remaining strength, he raised his head, and, in a voice that pierced the crowd around, said,

“Return to the Church of Rome! No! Rather would I say to all who hear me, in the words of holy Writ, ‘Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not her plagues!’”

He sunk back quite exhausted by the effort, and the abbot made a sign to remove him to the last scene of suffering. Careless hands lifted the mangled form, from which a few groans only were elicited by this new torture. Unable to hold himself erect, his body was sustained by the chains that bound him to the stake, while his venerable head drooped forward and lay upon his breast, a spectacle of pity to every heart not closed to humanity; and many tears were shed, even by those who thought he had wandered from the right path.

The same form of entreaty was then gone through with Laval; but he raised up his voice, and proclaimed, in tones of thunder,

“‘They smite down thy people, oh Lord, and trouble thine heritage.’ ‘They gather them together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood.’ ‘They have imagined craftily against thy people, and taken counsel against thy secret ones.’”

Exasperated against him on account of his determined contumacy, the chief among the priests stood forth, holding the cross high above his head, and replied, in a sonorous voice,

“‘God standeth in the congregation of princes; he is a judge among gods.’ ‘I will smite down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him.’ ‘When sentence is given upon him, let him be condemned, and let his prayer be turned into sin.’ ‘Let his children be vagabonds, and beg their bread.’”

The signal was given to remove Laval also to the pile; but as he went, he took up a portion of the same psalm, and in spite of their efforts to stop him, continued:

“‘His delight was in cursing, and it shall happen unto him.’ ‘He loved not blessing, therefore shall it be far from him.’ ‘He clothed himself with cursing as with a garment, and it shall be unto him as a cloak that he hath upon him, and as a girdle that he is always girdled withal.’”

A ball was thrust into his mouth, and the reverend in-

quisitor was determined to have the last word. He raised his symbol, and exclaimed in tones that seemed to reverberate above the crowd, while he pointed with his left hand to the two bound forms,

“‘And the people shall know that this is thy hand, and that thou, Lord, hast done it.’”

“Amen,” was echoed by all the priests; but there were few hearts in the crowd that gave credence to his words. Then the abbot turned to Chastain,

“My son, even at the eleventh hour, the heart of the Mother of God is moved to intercede for the erring. As Christ saved the malefactor on the cross, so are we ready to offer you the right hand of Christian fellowship once more, if you will give the worship of a true heart to that faith which our great Head taught on earth.”

“I do offer that worship, daily and hourly,” replied Chastain, “and for that alone I am here, condemned to die by that Church which claims to be the only exponent of the truth. I must expiate my sincere convictions of right by the fearful ordeal before me; but I shrink not from it. I avow myself a member of that Catholic or universal Church to which all the true followers of Christ belong; but I am no longer a Papist. I disclaim all communion with those who falsify the teachings of the Gospel; who insult the divinity of Christ, by placing above him a mere mortal woman, in the person of the Virgin Mary.”

Had the whole of this address been audible to the crowd, Chastain's chance of escape would have been small indeed; but at that point where he avowed himself a member of the Catholic Church, at a signal from the abbot, the drums sounded a deafening peal, which completely drowned the sound of his voice. That avowal was quite sufficient for their purpose, and the concluding words were unheard. The prisoner was forcibly prevented from making any farther attempt to gain a hearing, for the priest waved his hand toward the people, and in a loud voice proclaimed,

“In consideration of the confession of this our beloved

son, Claude Chastain, of a belief in the holy Catholic Church, his punishment is commuted to exile. He will join a party of Huguenots who leave for Montpellier to-day, there to be shipped for Canada; and may the Virgin and all the saints have mercy upon him, as we have, and keep him in the right way."

Chastain made violent efforts to obtain a hearing, but those around him forcibly withheld him; and he was hurried from the scene to the outskirts of the town, where a party of both sexes and all ages, from twelve upward, were chained together in pairs preparatory to setting out for their port of embarkation for a land which offered them a life of slavery, in a climate widely contrasted with the sunny one from which they were exiled.

The sad scene he had left proceeded. The pyre was lighted, and the victims perished by its unutterable torture to the sound of the hymns chanted by the exulting priests. No evidence of weakness was wrung from either of them. The pastor was too far gone to suffer long. At the moment of lighting the pile, the gag was removed from the mouth of Laval, and one of the men thrust an iron crucifix against his lips, from which he recoiled, for it was heated until it seared the skin as it touched it.

"Behold!" he exclaimed, "how this lost and ruined wretch shrinks from the holy symbol of our faith."

Laval glared on him with his wild black eyes, but he thought him unworthy of a retort. He turned to the crowd, and continued to proclaim his steadfast belief in the ultimate triumph of the cause for which he suffered, until the rising flames stifled him.

These extreme proceedings shocked even many of the Papists, and the Huguenots left the scene more firmly convinced than before that no safety remained to them save in the abandonment of home and country.

Lefevre tarried no longer than Chastain's removal. He followed him, in the hope that an opportunity would be obtained of speaking with him; but the officials were on the

alert to prevent communication with any one; and after lingering around the hapless party until they set out on their melancholy journey, he rejoined Delmont. He informed him that it was his intention to set out himself for Montpellier, that he might witness the embarkation of the prisoners, and obtain a last interview with his friend previous to his departure.

"It is best that you shall do so," replied Delmont, gravely; "and I would advise you to lay aside your uniform, and assume the dress of a citizen; for I have received from a friend an intimation that orders commanding your arrest have been sent from Paris."

"I looked for something of the kind, from a singular warning I received a few hours before my departure from the city. Truly, the King of France himself seems to have adopted the motto of the Church—"that no faith is to be kept with heretics." I will assume a disguise that shall baffle them; and while I go on a mission to Chastain, you can complete our arrangements here. On my return, I will fly with Irene from this miserable country, and seek such contentment as I may now find in erecting another home in the forests of the West."

They put spurs to their horses, and gained the cottage as speedily as possible. With the assistance of Ammonet, Gerould was soon metamorphosed into a plain countryman, and his fine-blooded war-horse was exchanged for the heavier one of the dragoon. Thus equipped, he left the valley as the sun was setting; and it was well for him that his movements were so rapid, for within an hour after his departure the cottage was visited by those commissioned to arrest him, and great was their chagrin at learning his escape.

Captain Delmont had also left, and the shrewd replies of Ammonet entirely misled the dragoons in their pursuit of the fugitive.

In the mean time, the wretched procession of captives had set out on their journey to Montpellier. Delicate women, who had never before known hardship, and aged and nearly

helpless men, were handcuffed and tied together. They walked through the day, and at night were consigned to a loathsome prison in a village on the route, without a bed on which to lie, and supplied with only a scanty portion of bread and water, that barely sufficed to sustain life.

Chastain was young and strong in comparison with many of his fellow-captives; though his sufferings during his long imprisonment had greatly reduced him. The companion assigned him was an old man of seventy, who had once been a large landed proprietor, noted for the spirit of justice and benevolence which had characterized him; and to him Chastain gladly extended the assistance of his stronger arm in getting over the weary way.

The enduring fortitude which sustained these people was wonderful. Though ready to sink from exhaustion, they struggled on, uttering no complaint; only asking strength to bear their burden with that patience which had characterized Him who had even died that they might have everlasting life.

Just before they reached Montpellier, the companion of Chastain died of fatigue; and they paused a short time while the dragoons that guarded them dug a shallow grave, into which they threw him, with no prayer to consecrate the burial. The Huguenots would have sung and prayed over his remains, but this privilege was refused them, and they were hurried from the spot: only in their hearts could they consecrate the memory of this martyr to his constancy.

They reached Montpellier in a wretched condition, and found, awaiting their arrival, many more exiles in as bad plight as themselves. A vessel was already waiting for its human cargo, and they were at once marched to the water's edge. There a crazy, miserable-looking ship lay at anchor, incapable of accommodating with comfort more than half the prisoners; but that was a matter of small moment to the inhuman men that doomed them to such a fate.

To an experienced eye the vessel was evidently unseawor-

thy ; and in addition to the anguish of being torn from their native land, and cast upon a foreign shore in a state of most calamitous servitude, was the fear that they would perish on the sea. Parents were here whose children had been forcibly torn from them to be placed under Romish instruction ; and at one blow they were thus severed from home and children, never again even to hear the fate of their beloved little ones. Wives were separated from their husbands, and young girls and lads far away from the parental roof.

So great an accumulation of misery is difficult to imagine ; yet such were the scenes enacted for so long a series of years, that the heart sickens to recall their horrors. The prisoners were released from their handcuffs, and conducted to the cabin of the ship. She had been fitted up for freight, and had few accommodations for passengers ; three hundred of whom were thrust into her, with no stores for a sea-voyage ; rarely even possessing a change of raiment, and at an inclement season of the year bound to a land of snow and ice.

Among the crowd a countryman was seen looking anxiously around him, as if seeking some one in whom he was interested. At length his eye fell on a young man who employed himself busily in assisting those among the wretched exiles that seemed most to need it. He made his way to him, touched him on the shoulder, and spoke a few words in his ear. A fervent grasp of the hand was the response, and Chastain said, in a guarded tone,

"It is well you spoke, Gerauld, for your disguise is really perfect. I should never have known you."

"So much the better ; for I suspect I shall need its protection," replied Lefevre. "But come with me, Claude ; I have followed you to hold a last communion with you before we part."

"And Irene?" asked Chastain, with solicitude, as they threaded their way through the swaying crowd—"how does she bear up against all this sorrow ? Since that hour

of fearful separation, I have been refused all communication with her, and all information concerning her."

"My sister has shown more fortitude than I expected: she has suffered deeply, but she still hopes for the future. She bids me assure you of her fidelity to the last hour of her life; and she cherishes the belief that Heaven will reunite you, even in this world."

"My noble—my precious Irene! Tell her that all my efforts shall be directed to that end; and if human perseverance can accomplish it, I will join you in whatever land your wanderings may find a haven."

Lefevre had bribed the captain to permit him to come on board and have the use of his private cabin for half an hour. Thither he led Chastain, and closed the door. He then earnestly said,

"Claude, I do not believe it is designed that this ship shall ever reach its destination. A single storm must make a complete wreck of her; and at this season they may with certainty be expected. It is terrible to see this freight of human life consigned to inevitable destruction, with as little remorse as if they were so many dogs or horses."

"I have thought the same myself, ever since I saw the ship," replied Chastain, gloomily. "But there is no help for us; we are so carefully guarded, that there is no hope of escape, even if the land we have left afforded us an asylum. I am a strong swimmer, and may have a chance for my life, if the worst comes."

"'Forewarned is forearmed,' you know, Claude; gloomy as is the prospect, while there is strength and life, there is hope; and for Irene's sake, you will strive to escape the calamities that menace you. My father, I believe, has left France, for I can obtain no clew to him there; and, by the assistance of a friend, I hope to gain the sea-side in company with Irene, at a point where an English vessel has been engaged to take off a party of refugees. I shall proceed to London for the purpose of procuring land in the colony of Virginia. Thither we will emigrate, and en-

deavor to make a new home, and new interests in life. If we succeed in our plans, Claude, you will find us on the banks of James River; if not, death will interrupt them, and in heaven we will all be reunited."

"I will bear in mind all you have said, Gerauld; and if human power can achieve it, we will greet each other once more in the wilds of the New World."

Again they warmly grasped each other's hands, and then impulsively embraced. Chastain took his knife from his pocket, and, severing one of his dark locks, gave it to Lefevre as a parting token to Irene. The remainder of their interview passed rapidly away, and both were surprised when a rough head was thrust into the door, and the voice of the captain spoke:

"Time's up, mess-mate, and you had better be leaving; for the officers are on board searching for some man they are in pursuit of, who was expected to come here to see one of the prisoners."

"It is you they seek, without doubt," whispered Claude. "Leave me at once, Gerauld; to be seen with me would betray you, in spite of your disguise."

"I will baffle them yet," he sternly replied. "Remember, Chastain, all I have said; and I trust in God we shall meet under happier auspices."

"In His mercy is our only hope; for that of man seems at an end," replied Claude, as they once more embraced, and then parted.

Lefevre raised his tall form to its full height, and walked deliberately through the crowd until he gained the side of the ship. No attempt was made to stay his progress, although he passed close beside one of the officers who was describing his person, and offering a liberal reward to any one who would assist in capturing him. He trusted to a pair of false whiskers and eyebrows to conceal his identity; and the man himself did not for an instant dream that the tall countryman, who came so fearlessly forward, was the very person of whom he was in pursuit. Lefevre passed

down the ship's side, reached *terra firma* in safety, and carelessly sauntered toward the stable in which he had left his horse. He had ordered him to be kept in readiness for him at any moment, and he lost no time in mounting and rapidly leaving Montpellier behind him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE day after the interview with her brother, Irene was recalled to the Chateau de Montour, and Eugenia was again left to the companionship of the sisters. The parting of the friends was painful in the extreme, for both believed it to be final. Eugenia wept with a degree of passionate regret, for which she bitterly reproached herself, yet which she had no power to control. A faint, scarcely acknowledged fear, began to steal into the mind of the young novice that she had mistaken her vocation; that her heart, in spite of all her efforts, still clung to worldly affections; and she vaguely feared that the life she was about to embrace no longer seemed sufficient to satisfy the requirements of her affectionate nature.

Yet so great was the power established over her by the abbot, that she shrank from the imagined sacrilege of the thought. Of late, she had been kept busy preparing for her profession. Father Antoine visited her daily, and instructed her in the nature of the vows she was about to assume; and it seemed strange to Eugenia that all the sanctity of those vows appeared to be lost in his explanations. The unsuspecting girl attributed this to her own sinful feelings, and tried to become more worthy to dedicate herself to the service of Heaven by performing all the penances exacted of her with rigid scrupulousness. She spent many hours of the night kneeling on the cold floor of the chapel, earnestly praying for help, until, exhausted and shivering with cold, she crept to her couch to weep over the fallen state of that nature which could not utterly repudiate every earthly feeling and affection at the command of fanaticism.

Eugenia also deeply reproached herself with the instinct-

ive feeling of repulsion that was gradually rising in her mind toward her spiritual instructor. Her sensitive organization conveyed to her an intuitive warning, which she considered as another evidence of the sinful and ungrateful nature that dared to harbor such feelings toward one who so zealously labored for her eternal welfare.

In spite of all her efforts, the image of her gallant lover arose before her fancy, and her thoughts would wander to that future which might have been but for her own choice of a conventual life. With a shudder such thoughts were thrust aside, and a voluntary penance endured for the sin, far exceeding it in magnitude.

Such was the condition of the unhappy girl's mind as the day of her profession approached. Late on the preceding evening the abbot came to hear her last confession, in anticipation of the ceremony of the morning. The novice was summoned to the private apartment of the superior, who immediately left them alone. Father Antoine had just risen from the enjoyment of an epicurean repast, at which he had indulged in an unusual quantity of wine, and he was far less on his guard than he had hitherto been. In fact, he considered the fate of the helpless Eugenia as now entirely in his hands, and he was less scrupulous as to the impression his words might make upon her. His passion for her had so completely mastered his prudence, that he no longer willed to repress its expression; and the meek submission she had hitherto shown encouraged him to hope that he could even induce her to believe that no wrong could be committed where none was intended. The infraction of their vows, in permitting the mockery of a marriage service to unite them, would be sinless in the sight of Heaven, when absolution had been previously obtained from the highest authority in the Church, the Pope himself.

The priest deluded himself with the fond belief that he had won the affections of the young girl, and his power over her imagination and her heart must induce her to consent to any measure he sanctioned as right. She would

have knelt before him to make her confession at once, but he took her hand, and said, in his most persuasive tone,

"Come, my young friend, let us reason together a little while. Tell me how you are affected by the prospect that opens to you from to-morrow."

Eugenia was too ingenuous to conceal the truth; she faintly answered,

"I am afraid it does not seem so happy to me, holy father, as it once did. I know not how it is; but temptations, feelings I thought silenced forever, and thoughts at war with the sacred vocation I am about to assume, assail me hourly; and my life is a continued warfare against them."

"The subtle snares of the evil one, my gentle novice. But your conscience is so delicate, that you probably give more weight to them than you should. You will soon learn that our Church is not ascetic; refusing every indulgence to her dutiful children. It is necessary to impose this belief on the outside world, because we need the respect it inspires to support the factitious fabric we have raised as a monument to the superstition of man. Oh! this Church of ours is a great institution! By its means we appropriate untold wealth; we obtain the deferential respect of the world; and in secret really enjoy all the pleasures life may offer."

Eugenia listened in amazement and horror; this language was so new to her; so opposed to all her preconceived ideas, that she doubted the evidence of her own senses. She faltered,

"What, then, becomes of the pure worship of God, which you profess to make the object of your lives in separating yourselves from the world?"

"Do we not render it in our masses? in our multiplied forms and spectacles? Surely we honor our Creator in every possible manner; we have borrowed the most imposing ceremonies from the Jews, the Pagans, and even the Magi of the East have contributed to the pomp and grandeur of our service. We render solemn adoration to God in

the mysteries of the sacraments, and then He is not so unreasonable as to ask that our earthly nature shall be entirely disregarded. The Church, in her clemency, provides for the demands of the flesh by granting indulgences; and those who, in public, are faithful in the performance of their duties may, in private, seek that which will contribute to their individual happiness."

"But this seems to me a terrible perversion of the simple teachings of Christianity. Surely vital religion is not found in mere forms; and will not God feel himself insulted by the offering of mere lip service, while his commands to live a pure and upright life are disregarded?"

She spoke in a quiet tone, and the besotted priest went on in the belief that his words were producing the effect he desired:

"My charming little reasoner, do you not remember that it is said, 'to the pure in heart all things are pure?' That is the motto of the priest when he seems to exceed the strict tenure of his vows. Besides, the burdensome monastic rules are of man's invention, and belonged not to the primitive Church, as history will prove."

"I do not refer to those; but to the law of Christ and his Apostles, as set forth in the Scriptures," she replied, in a faltering tone; for the assured manner of the priest alarmed her, and made her tremble, she scarcely knew why. He regarded her with eyes beaming with earthly passion, and forcibly possessed himself of her hand, as he said,

"Christ himself said, 'love one another,' and toward you I have too literally obeyed the command. I have no power to control the interest with which you inspire me."

She sunk back nearly fainting, and the abbot hung over her in alarm.

"Does it so frighten you, my angel, to learn that even in the cloister the light of human affection will be permitted to beam upon your path? See, I venture to show you the reality of the life you have embraced; it claims not the relinquishment of every tie."

Eugenia recoiled from him in unaffected horror. She exclaimed,

"And this you dare to avow to me—to me, who believed myself entering upon the sacred road that leads to heaven; and in my first step in it I find falsehood and infamy. Oh, Father in heaven! save me—save me from this man!"

She forcibly tore her hand from his grasp and veiled her face with it, as if to shut out even the sight of what inspired her with such fear. Then he fixed his gleaming eyes upon her shrinking form, used his iron will against her feeble resistance, and gradually her hands drooped nervelessly upon her lap, unable to resist the subtle influence that compelled her to obey the impulse he chose to give her. Her pallid face lay before him deluged with tears; the heavy fringes of her eyelids were slowly lifted, and her gaze met the fascinating one that was fixed upon her.

"Eugenia," he whispered, in a triumphant tone, "by this magical power I know you to be my own. Resist my will you can not; for the strength is not in you. I have wound my subtle power around you until there is no escape; but I have only done so to give you happiness. God nor nature ever designed us to stifle the strong yearning for affection he has implanted within us. St. Paul said, 'let a bishop be the husband of one wife;' and until several centuries had elapsed, this absurd canon of celibacy was not established in the Church. I have authority to evade it, which on earth can not be gainsaid. The Pope can grant even that, and I offer you the position of a beloved and honored wife. I am promised the rank of cardinal, and I will remove to Rome and take you thither with me. I will place you in a house there even more lenient than this, and the tie that unites us will be recognized by the few who will be aware of it as sacred as any that binds two human hearts in one."

Eugenia listened to his words without power to interrupt them. She was like one bewildered in the mazes of a terrible dream, from which she would have been glad to arouse

herself by shrieking aloud. She slowly said, as if communing with herself,

"And for this I left a world in which I might have found affection and respect. For this loathsome offering of a heart that never knew the influence of God's pure spirit, though professedly devoted to His cause, I gave up the love of a noble and true nature. Oh! Father of the helpless, how shall I struggle back to the right path? How redeem myself from the iniquitous toils into which I have blindly fallen?"

"That is now impossible, Eugenia. You belong to us; and life itself will be the sacrifice if you now refuse to complete your profession. I have absolute power over your fate; but I do not intend to abuse it, my child."

The fumes of the wine were beginning to pass away, and the wily priest became aware that he had gone too far—that he had laid bare his intentions too early in the game: his influence was not so great as he had hoped, and he must endeavor to efface the evil impression he had made. Assuming his most persuasive tone, he said,

"Look up, my daughter; the ordeal is past, and you have nobly borne it. I spoke but in jest. I merely wished to try if your heart is really so completely devoted to Heaven as to be inaccessible to temptation. I now know and feel that it is pure as gold thrice refined. Pardon me the pain I see I have inflicted upon you."

He took this sudden tack, in the hope that the inexperience and implicit faith hitherto shown by his victim would enable the shallow deception to pass. Eugenia listened to him passively. The shock she had received stunned her perceptions, and she felt that she must have time to reflect, to see if one gleam of hope remained that she could extricate herself from the terrible fate that awaited her. To tear herself from the inexplicable influence this evil man wielded over her was now the first desire of her heart; for she shuddered to think what the future might develop. His subtle powers of persuasion might even induce her to be-

lieve that right which she now considered unpardonable. He might in time bring her down to his own level, thus causing her to lose self-respect on earth, and the hope of salvation in heaven.

She comprehended his power, and quailed before it with a mortal terror that made her frame shiver and her heart grow sick within her. She heard his voice sounding in her ears, uttering every assurance that could soothe her and restore confidence in himself; but the veil was rent, never again to be interposed between her soul and the hideous truth that stood revealed before her. In place of entering a house dedicated to the great Jehovah, as she had fondly believed, she found herself in a sink of impurity, out of which it seemed impossible that any good thing could come. She at last feebly asked,

"Is it really impossible for me to retrace the steps I have taken?"

"Quite impossible," was the emphatic reply. "You have gone too far to recoil. It is known far and wide that you will take the vows to-morrow, and they must be taken."

"Can not some other one be substituted in my place?" she despairingly asked. "Let me go forth alone; keep my fortune; I ask no portion of it; only let me have freedom once more to act as my conscience dictates. Oh! why did I ever consent to take the veil so soon?"

"Daughter, have you forgotten the pledges given by you, if I would lean to the side of mercy and spare the lover of your friend? Chastain was saved mainly through your influence, because I wished to show you that we are not destitute of compassion. Why, then, wish to escape from us yourself? I must condemn you to a penance for this sin: four hours of the coming night must be passed in vigils in the chapel, while you pray to the Virgin for forgiveness for the rebellion which has so suddenly entered your soul. And now I will listen to your confession."

Eugenia dared not disobey the command. She knelt before him, and, in the desperation of her heart, laid bare all

the doubts and fears that had of late assailed her. The abbot listened with a frowning brow, and when the name of Gerauld Lefevre came from her faltering lips, he secretly uttered an anathema against him, and invoked the aid of saint or demon to give success to the emissaries commissioned to arrest him, that he might gain the power to control his fate. As she ceased speaking, he mildly said,

"I suspected, my daughter, that some worldly affection had asserted its power over you, and I find I was not mistaken. Exorcise this evil with prayer, my child. Recite fifty aves in expiation, in addition to the first penance imposed on you, and to-morrow, I doubt not, your mind will be in a more suitable frame for the solemn duties before you. May the Holy Virgin be with you this night to console and sustain you in the right path."

He arose, and slowly stalked from the room, leaving her so wretched, so utterly crushed by what had just occurred, that it seemed to her as if death at that moment would be the most blessed boon Heaven could bestow upon her. She slowly went to the chapel, and passed the long hours in prayer, as she had been commanded, but not to the Virgin. In that hour of mortal suffering, the intercession of all the saints, with the Madonna at their head, seemed a solemn mockery. To God alone, in the solitude of the night, could she pour forth her anguish; from Omniscience alone could she ask that help which His power only could afford her in the desperate strait in which she stood.

She was not conscious of the lapse of time; and when the nuns came in to morning mass, Eugenia still lay prostrate on the steps of the altar, wearying Heaven with supplications to enable her to escape the terrible ordeal of the approaching day, even at the sacrifice of life itself. In her present state of mind she could not—she dared not take the vows; and the confessor had asserted that to refuse them now was death. "Then let death come!" she said; yet she shuddered at the appalling thought. She was yet so young, that life had something to allure her; and the fate

awarded to the recusant nun was so terrible, that her soul shrank with thrilling dread from its bare contemplation. One of the most compassionate among the sisters came forward, and assisted her to rise. She accompanied her to her apartment, and brought restoratives, which the poor sufferer greatly needed. Completely exhausted, she sunk into a death-like sleep, from which she was aroused when the hour came to be arrayed in the costly bridal robes prepared for that ceremony in which she was to renounce all the pomps and vanities of life.

The shrinking victim passively permitted herself to be decorated with costly lace and glittering gems. Attended by the superior and all the sisterhood, she went into the private chapel, and joined in the preparatory masses; she was then led into the church to take her part in the public ceremony.

This large building was crowded to its utmost capacity. On the left extended the choir, with an arched ceiling elaborately carved and gilded. On the right was the great body of the church, with its lofty dome enriched with sculptures. The small sanctuaries opening on each side of the altar, were draped with embroidered curtains, the work of the nuns, and decorated with paintings of scriptural subjects. Several niches were occupied by the shrines of the saints, before which votive lamps were kept constantly burning.

But the grand centre of attraction was the great altar. It was one blaze of light, flowers, and jewels. On this occasion all the wealth of the convent was displayed, and the altar-cloth glittered with its costly embroidery of pearls, emeralds, and diamonds. A light grating in front of all this splendor scarcely concealed any portion of it from the immense crowd within the body of the building.

The lofty arcades echoed with the magnificent strains of music that swelled from the deep-toned organ, accompanied by several charming and highly-trained voices. As the anthem died away, a train came slowly winding around the altar, consisting of the superior and her nuns; and as these

dark-robed forms faced the audience, the figure of the young novice stood conspicuous among them, with her white robes sweeping around her slender person, her long glittering hair rolling in sunny ripples over the snowy lace of her dress, and crowned with a wreath of orange-flowers.

She was pale—oh! so pale that one might almost have deemed her an exquisitely fashioned statue, endowed with powers of volition, but for the wild and restless eyes that roamed over the crowd before her, as if seeking some compassionate glance to which she might appeal in this, her hour of dire extremity.

The bishop of the diocese conducted the imposing ceremonies, assisted by the abbot in full canonicals, and the latter glanced with some uneasiness toward Eugenia when she first appeared. He seemed satisfied with her air of drooping submission, and again turned to the duties before him.

The opening ceremonies were finished—again the tide of music poured through the walls: the novice stood in front of the nuns; the wreath was removed from her brow, as she mechanically pronounced the words that were whispered in her ear by the superior, for she had quite forgotten the formula in which she had been assiduously instructed. The sacrilegious hand was about to be raised to sever her tresses from her head, when Eugenia uttered a thrilling cry, as she sprang forward and stretched forth her arms toward some one in the crowd.

“Oh, Gerould! save me—save me!”

The abbot was near her; he clutched her fiercely, and, drawing her back, muttered,

“Would you have me stain the very steps of the altar with your blood? Recoil now, and I will immolate you to the insulted majesty of Heaven.”

Another wild cry issued from her lips, and she sunk fainting at his feet. Efforts were made to restore her by sprinkling holy water over her, that the ceremony might be completed; but she showed no signs of returning life for so long

a period, that they were compelled to remove her, and state to the audience that sudden illness had seized the half-made nun, and it was necessary to defer the completion of her profession to some future day.

The crowd dispersed, wondering what sudden frenzy had seized the novice and induced her to act thus. The bishop was so dreadfully scandalized, that he insisted on the immediate trial of her who had brought such a signal disgrace upon the Church, and that summary punishment should be awarded her.

But one heart went forth from that exciting scene in a tumult of fear and hope, which almost unmanned him. Gerould Lefevre could not withstand the impulse that moved him to see her he had so long and truly loved renounce the world; and he had ventured into the church only in the disguise of a workman's dress, without using any effort to conceal his features; for he wished Eugenia to see and recognize them. It was his eye she had caught; to him she had appealed, in the impulse of the moment, and he vowed within his soul that her appeal should not be made in vain. He would risk life and liberty to rescue her; though how it was to be done he could not yet see.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON the return of Lefevre from Montpellier he reached the cottage in the night, and he approached the building with the precaution taught him by his military habits. It was fortunate for him that he did so, for, on reconnoitering, he found that it contained more inhabitants than when he left it. Four horses were sheltered in the small stable, and by the dim light of approaching day he recognized two of them as belonging to the dragoons. He could easily conjecture that their errand there was to capture him on his return, and he took his measures accordingly. He removed his own steed to the deepest part of the neighboring wood, and, securely fastening him, returned to seek an interview either with Delmont or Ammonet. The latter he expected would be on the alert, and he stationed himself beneath the shelter of a copse of underwood an arrow's flight from the door, to watch for his appearance.

A faint streak of crimson had just begun to show itself in the east, when Ammonet came forth, glanced keenly around him, and then moved toward the stable. In so doing, he passed near Gerauld's place of concealment, and the latter pronounced his name distinctly, though in a guarded tone. Ammonet made a slight pause, but was careful to look in a different direction as he inquired,

"Hist, colonel; is that you? I have been watching for you. Our house is in possession of the enemy. Stay in the woods by the old spring until I can come to you. In an hour I will join you."

He passed on, and two strange dragoons came to the door of the house, and prepared to follow him to look after their horses. No sooner were they safe within the stable

than Lefevre emerged from his covert, and, gaining the appointed place of meeting, threw himself beneath a tree to seek repose until Ammonet came. Nearly two hours passed before he appeared; he then brought food with him, which he placed before the hungry traveler. As Gerauld refreshed himself, Ammonet said,

"My captain could not come to you himself without arousing the suspicions of those that are sent here to watch for you; but he bids me say that Mademoiselle Irene is safe at the chateau, and every thing is in readiness for your escape two nights hence. In the mean time, the dragoons are looking for you every where, to make you a prisoner, and you must go with me to a place of hiding."

"And where have you found such a place, Ammonet? I am quite willing to occupy it; for I am wearied with rapid journeying, and need rest to prepare me for the risks of our final escape."

"It's a gloomy spot, monsieur, on account of what's occurred in it; but it's the only one I know of where you will be safe. You have heard of the cave where so many of the Huguenots were slaughtered?"

"Yes; and is that the only asylum open to me?"

"Even that wouldn't be safe, monsieur, if it wasn't for a secret I have. In my youth I was bred to the trade of a locksmith, and gained great skill in it before I gave it up to become a soldier. This was known to many of my comrades; and when the Abbess of the Sisters of Mercy wanted the avenue closed that leads under her convent from the cave, I was sent for to make the locks secure. The sights I saw as I passed through the place where the dead Huguenots lay turned my heart somehow against my own people, and I'm afraid I've never been a good Catholic since.

"The order was that I was to make the lock fasten on the inside alone; but I deceived them—for what purpose I could not then tell; but now I know why I was led to do it. I made two keys, one of which I concealed; and I managed to cover the keyhole on the side next to the

cave so ingeniously that no one would suspect its existence. You must go there, and if the dragoons seek you there, as they probably will—for it is open now to any one—you can use my key, and retreat into the secret passage."

"Thank you, Ammonet. Since there is no other spot open to me, I must go there, I suppose; though the associations connected with the cave are not the most enlivening to one situated as I am."

"It's the safest place you can find about here, monsieur. I heard last night that stricter orders have been issued for your arrest, and the priest they call Father Antoine has offered a large reward to any one that will bring you to him. To-day it's likely the whole country will be scoured over to catch you, and it will take some management to get you safe to the cave."

"Let us lose as little time as possible, then. I only wish I could meet the priest as man to man, I am afraid his clerical character would not then be a protection to him; for once he should be forced to fight with other weapons than craft and cruelty."

"He comes nearer the old evil one of all than any body I ever expect to see," said Ammonet, shaking his head; "for he goes ramping about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Well, colonel, I must leave you now; but when I can get away from the dragoons, I will meet you at the foot of the hills, where the cross stands over the grave of the murdered traveler."

The spot indicated was familiar to Lefevre, and he knew it to be well selected, as several roads met there, leading through the forest in one direction, and into the wildest recesses of the Black Mountains in the others; thus affording more than one avenue of escape in case his pursuers should come suddenly upon him.

"I will await you there," he said, as they parted; and Ammonet returned to the cottage.

Several miles lay between the fugitive and the point to be gained, and he mounted his horse soon after the depart-

ure of the dragoon, and cautiously threaded the forest paths, listening ever and anon, and avoiding the approach of any straggler.

The sun was high in the heavens when he reached the cross which leaned from the roadside, moss-grown and weather-stained—a monument to a barbarous murder committed there nearly half a century before; and a cairn of stones lay heaped around its base—an offering from the superstitious country people, who believed it a pious duty as they passed to throw a stone upon the pile. A thick growth of underwood, on the side next to the forest, offered a sufficient shelter both for his horse and himself, and there Lefevre awaited the appearance of his guide.

Twice he heard parties pass, that, from their conversation, were evidently in pursuit of himself, and he stood with his bridle in his hand, ready to leap into the saddle, and dash among the hills at the slightest intimation on their part of an intention to turn aside from the main road.

At length the voice of Ammonet, trolling an air of which he was fond, came to the ears of the tired watcher, and in a few more moments he joined Lefevre.

"Ah! colonel, I am glad to find you safe; for, as I told you, there's a regular search after you. That meddling old priest has been to our house asking after you himself, and roundly telling my captain that his intimacy with a heretic, and a suspected man, is not to be tolerated. I stole off and left him there; so now, as the road seems clear, let us dash into the mountain path before us, and get to the cave as soon as may be."

No second bidding was necessary. Lefevre mounted, and the two set out at full speed toward the desired spot. Fortunately no interruption occurred, and in safety they reached the narrow gorge leading to the dizzy mountain path before described. At that point they dismounted, and Ammonet fastened the horses to the stem of a cedar that jutted out from the hillside. With firm steps the well-trained soldiers threaded the narrow way, and in a few moments

reached the open space in front of the entrance. The door, so artfully contrived, was broken in fragments; and the opening lay dark and grim before them.

Ammonet had brought the means of striking a light, and a bundle of torches with him. All was silent within, and, after lighting one of these, they ventured to enter. As they passed on, Gerauld gazed with awe upon the scene so wonderfully made by nature—so terribly desecrated by man. The cave had been often visited by the brutal soldiery since the night of the massacre, and their favorite amusement was to deface and destroy the exquisite workmanship which untold ages had been necessary to produce.

The floors were covered with fragments blackened by the gunpowder used in blowing them up, and occasionally one was seen bearing upon its surface the bloody witness of the crime consummated there. Many battle-fields had Lefevre witnessed, but nothing had ever moved his manly heart like this scene of unresisting slaughter of a people whose only crime was the worship of Deity in a different form from that prescribed by authority.

They paused a few moments beside the spot on which the altar had stood, and Ammonet described to his companion the awful scene enacted there. Around it were the graves of the hapless Huguenots; and age, manhood, youth, and infancy lay there, until the final resurrection shall bring them before the face of Him who will judge justly between the oppressor and the oppressed. Then what will it avail them that they cry, "Lord, in thy name have we done this," when He replies, "Depart from me ye workers of iniquity, I know ye not?"

"Let us not tarry here," said Gerauld. "The terrible scene brought so vividly before me makes my heart sick."

Ammonet led the way toward the passage discovered by Ferron, and they threaded it slowly and cautiously. The inner cavern was also desolate; and that, too, had shared in the passion for destruction manifested by the soldiers: scarcely a portion remained untouched by desecrating vio-

lence. The avenue leading from this had been artfully concealed by piling in front of it the enormous boulders which had been scattered around.

Ammonet had some difficulty himself in finding the exact spot behind which the entrance lay. By creeping through the open spaces between the immense masses, he gained it at length; and then, by applying the strength of the two to remove the obstructions in their way, they opened a passage in a lateral direction, which could afford free ingress to two persons walking abreast.

Then Ammonet held the light close to the iron plate which covered the lock, and pointed out to Gerauld how nicely it was contrived to escape observation. He touched a concealed spring, and it slowly glided back and revealed the aperture for the key. On applying this, the lock turned readily, and, unclosing the door, the gloomy avenue stretched darkly before them. Ammonet had brought a supply of food, and the means of keeping a light. These were deposited on this spot as the safest place; and he advised Lefevre to remain either within or near it, that he might be ready to secure his retreat at a moment's warning. Captain Delmont, he assured him, would see him that night, and more fully explain the measures he had taken to secure his escape.

Ammonet then left him, and, worn out with fatigue and loss of rest, Lefevre at once ensconced himself within this secure retreat, and sought the repose he so greatly needed. He carefully secured his light, and then, spite of his uneasiness, slept for several hours.

He was aroused by the sound of shouts and blasphemies in the cave, and soon ascertained that an active search for himself was proceeding, in which a large party seemed engaged. Lefevre removed his light beyond a curve in the avenue, lest a glimmer of it around the edges of the door should betray him. He then returned to the opening and listened to the conversation of his pursuers. The voice of one who seemed in authority said,

"Boys! leave not a nook unexplored; for Father Antoine has doubled the reward this morning. This pestilent heretic comes from a nest of unbelievers that are as stiff-necked as Satan himself, and his reverence wants to catch him as an example."

"We'll find him if he is burrowed any where here, for we know every hiding-place in the old black hole."

In their search they came among the boulders, and peeped around them. Lefevre drew his pistols and cocked them, ready for use in case they should be needed; for, assured of the safety of the retreat he had provided him, Ammonet had inadvertently taken the key away with him, thus leaving Gerauld without any efficient means of securing the aperture should the soldiers have the hardihood to attempt opening it. One of them spoke close beside it:

"Boys! here's the door the nuns had put here. Now wouldn't you like to get through on the other side, and see what them Sisters of Mercy does with them they haven't any mercy on? I'm sure I would."

"It don't matter if you would; they've taken pretty good care to keep the likes o' you out o' their dark places. Why they do say that there are heretics kept under ground there that will never see the light of day again."

"And it's good enough for them; only I think it's queer treatment for women who call themselves Sisters of Mercy to give to others, just because they don't think alike about the mass. For my part, I don't see any use in thinking, especially when it's dangerous. Let the priest do that for me, and keep fair weather between me and my conscience. I pay him for it, and it is his business."

The men seated themselves upon the boulders, and seemed disposed to hold a regular carouse. They took out their wine flasks, and drank to each other's health. They remained there until peremptorily summoned away by the officer in command; and for several hours Gerauld could hear their voices sounding through the cavern.

Finally all became still again, and he took a book from

his pocket and endeavored to read ; but his mind could not fix itself upon it. The consciousness that the building so near him contained Eugenia, whom he was so soon to lose forever, filled him with restless and miserable reflections. On the morrow she was to take the vows, and he was resolute to brave every danger to behold her once more.

At midnight Delmont came, accompanied by Ammonet. The two friends held a long conference, in which every detail of the proposed flight was arranged. A light covered wagon, such as were used by country people for transporting grain to market, was to await them in the hills at a point about half a mile from the cave which was on the direct route to the sea. Thither Delmont undertook to convey Irene in safety. She was no longer watched closely, and could effect her escape from the chateau with little difficulty.

Captain Delmont strongly opposed the intention of Lefevre to be present at the profession of the young nun on the following day ; but Gerauld would listen to no remonstrances. He felt that he *must* see Eugenia once again, and the risk to himself weighed as nothing against that fervent, resistless desire to behold her, although it was only to renounce him forever, together with all that can make life worth endurance. As Delmont arose to go, he said,

“By coming here in the night, I have evaded the vigilance of the dragoons quartered on me as spies, and I must return before day. Remember, Lefevre, that two hours before dawn on to-morrow night you must be at the Eagle Pass: the wagon will be partially loaded, to deceive those who may pass it, but ample space will be reserved in the centre to render you and Irene comfortable. If possible, I will meet you at the sea-coast ; if not, the driver will be accompanied by Ammonet, who knows the precise cove in which the English brig lies awaiting your arrival. I shall myself place Irene under your protection ; so, at all events, we shall meet once more. And now, may God bless you, and bring

you safely out of all your perils, is the sincere prayer of my heart."

Thus they parted, and Gerauld again snatched a few hours of fitful repose. When he awoke, he partook of the cold provisions Ammonet had left him, and, taking a freshly-lighted torch, proceeded to thread his way to the entrance. Desolation marked the route, and there was now little difficulty in tracing it. He wandered slowly along until he reached the opening, through which the morning sun was brightly shining.

Extinguishing his torch, Lefevre carefully concealed it, and stepped forth in the light of day. All was still around him, and, after gaining the main road, he struck into a pathway which he knew would lead, by a circuitous route, to the chapel attached to the convent. Every nook among the hills had been familiar to him in his boyish years; and with such knowledge of the country, he doubted not his power to evade the pursuit after him in case he should be recognized. He had thought it best to remove the false wig and eyebrows, as in the close contact of a crowd the attempt at a disguise might be detected, and lead to suspicions he could otherwise avoid.

Near the entrance to the chapel, Lefevre mingled with the crowd that streamed into it without attracting particular notice, and with a heart devoured by anxiety and disappointment he looked on the pomp with which they sought to immolate the victim of their wiles. He placed himself where he could command a good view of the altar; and when Eugenia, pallid, and evidently suffering greatly, stood before him, he with difficulty restrained himself from rushing forward and making an insane attempt to tear her from the altar.

But when Eugenia caught his eye—when she raised her arms and appealed to him to save her, his agitation became overpowering. He started forward, but felt himself forcibly withheld. On looking around, he saw Ammonet, who had fortunately sought him out and secured a place near him. He whispered,

"For God's sake, be quiet, monsieur, and I can put you in a better way to save that poor girl than to lose yourself in trying to help her."

"How? in what manner?" muttered he, in reply.

"Come with me, and I will tell you in a better place than this."

By this time Eugenia had been removed from the altar, and Lefevre became more composed. His excitement had evidently attracted observation, and amidst lowering looks he made his way to the door, followed by Ammonet. As the latter was known by his uniform to be one of the dragoons, it was supposed by the crowd that he was following Lefevre as a suspicious person, and both thus gained the open air in safety. Together they struck into the hills, and while they held a consultation from which important results were to flow, we will return to Eugenia.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE bishop who had conducted the ceremonies of the morning was a man of violent prejudices and unyielding firmness. He held the honor of the Church above every earthly thing, and great was his exasperation at the scene which had brought such scandal upon it. He peremptorily commanded that condign punishment should be visited on the helpless girl who had been its cause: her trial must take place immediately, as he chose to pronounce her sentence himself, and his presence was demanded in Toulouse, to sit in judgment on several conspicuous heretics.

He summoned the trembling abbess before him, and sternly questioned her as to the discipline to which the novice had been subjected. She could with truth answer that, until the moment of her strange outcry, she had supposed Mademoiselle Altenberg to be a voluntary candidate for the veil. She gave a concise relation of her entrance into her house, and the subsequent incidents in her life, to which the reverend prelate listened incredulously.

"It is very strange," he said, "that at the last moment she should thus recoil; and yet you should have no suspicion of the unwillingness with which she assumed the vows."

"It is nevertheless quite true, holy father. I was as much surprised, and as deeply shocked as yourself at her conduct."

"Who has been her confessor? He must have known the state of her mind."

The abbot was standing in a recess listening to this conversation. He stepped forward and replied,

"I occupied that post, monseigneur, and until within a few days past Mademoiselle Altenberg seemed perfectly happy in the prospect of dedicating her life to the service

of Heaven. In that time the son of the recusant Lefevre has been seen in this neighborhood: he was once betrothed to her, and doubtless this is the last temptation of the evil one to win the soul of this promising candidate from the joys of paradise. Unfortunately, the sister of Colonel Lefevre was received here a short time, and, in the hope of bringing her over as a proselyte, Mademoiselle Altenberg was permitted to associate freely with her. Doubtless the presence of the sister brought back the memory of the brother, and unfortunately caused this outburst. I trust, my lord bishop, that you will have compassion on this young girl, and not judge her with the extreme rigor the Church permits in such cases."

This defense was ingenious, but it availed not against the anger of the bishop. He exclaimed,

"*Such cases!* I trust that this is the first one on record of so flagrant an insult to the sacred majesty of the holy Catholic Church. I am bound by my position to maintain that dignity, and I command that this girl shall be brought to trial within the hour, and I myself will sit in judgment on her before I proceed to my other duties."

There was no resource but to obey, and the superior went to the cell to which Eugenia had been conveyed, to ascertain if she was in a condition to comprehend the proceedings about to take place against her. As one condemned by her own contumacy, she had been placed in a small square room in the subterranean part of the building, which contained nothing save the hard pallet on which she lay, a crucifix, and a vase of holy water.

One of the humbler sisters was with her, and when the superior entered Eugenia had recovered from her long attack of insensibility, and was sitting on the side of the couch endeavoring to recall her bewildered faculties. The sight of the abbess brought the whole scene in which she had so lately acted vividly before her, and she raised her hand to ascertain if her hair had been severed from her head. She looked up and said,

"The rite was not finished then, and I am not a profess-
ed nun?"

"So much the worse for you, poor child," replied the
abbess, compassionately. "What sudden frenzy seized you,
and caused you to lose yourself thus? The bishop will not
be appeased. He insists on an immediate trial; and you
know enough of our discipline, Eugenia, to be aware to
what that inevitably leads."

Eugenia grew even paler than before. She pressed her
hand upon her heart, and after an instant asked,

"What is the extreme punishment I have incurred?"

The superior was not so destitute of feeling as to be will-
ing to answer her. She evasively said,

"You will soon know. Even now the judgment hall is
preparing, and you must soon be led to it."

"By whom will I be tried?"

"The bishop will preside, assisted by Father Antoine and
one of the brothers from the Dominicans."

Eugenia covered her face with her hands, and the trem-
ulous motion of her slight frame betrayed what was passing
within her; but after a struggle she conquered her fear.
The natural courage of her soul arose to sustain her; she
felt that she was the wronged one; and she would, in these
last moments, speak the truth, even if martyrdom should be
the result.

Presently a blow was struck upon the door that sound-
ed sonorously through the vaulted passages, and a deep-
toned voice commanded,

"Bring forth the prisoner!"

The door was thrown wide at the summons, and two
tall forms stood without covered completely by their sa-
ble garments. With a strength Eugenia had not believed
was left in her frame she stepped forth and walked between
them. They reached that terrible room from which the
accused never issued save to die or meet imprisonment for
life, and she was placed in the chair for condemnation; a
strange figure to be there and thus—for she still wore her

bridal robes, and her hair fell in heavy masses over the back and arms, forming a golden veil around her person.

Eugenia had nerved herself for the ordeal, and the abbot gazed with surprise upon the erect head, the lately colorless cheeks, now tinged with a faint streak of crimson, and the resolute mien. He found means to pass behind her chair and whisper,

"Follow my lead, and I may save you from the worst."

As he again gained a view of her face, he saw with anger and alarm that her lip was curled with an expression that seemed to defy his wiles.

The bishop still wore his canonical robes, and he formed a singular contrast to the sable figures beside him. With a stern brow he regarded the prisoner; her youth, nor the position in which she was placed, did not move him. He only saw in her one who had dared to offer insult to the only thing he had been taught through life to reverence—the authority of the Church, and he was ready to judge her accordingly. His deep-toned voice rang out clear and hard as he said,

"Eugenia Altenberg, you are brought hither to answer for the highest crime you can commit against the most august of earthly institutions. You have insulted the sacred Majesty of Heaven by refusing the vows you had been prepared to take. What have you to say for yourself in excuse for your sacrilegious and most disgraceful conduct to-day?"

Eugenia's voice arose clear and distinct as she replied, "Nothing, my lord bishop, have I to advance save the extreme unwillingness with which I came forward to assume the veil."

"And why this unwillingness? I am informed that the superior even suspected not its existence."

"Nor did it exist until a few hours since. I sincerely desired to become a nun. I permitted the term of my novitiate to be shortened at the earnest solicitation of my confessor; but when I ascertained from him that, so far from becoming a religious devotee, I was only gaining the liberty to

do evil which exceeds that permitted in the world I desired to renounce, I recoiled with all my soul from the profession I had wished to make. This, my lord, is my only defense."

The bishop turned to Father Antoine, and sternly asked, "What, then, have you laid bare to her?"

"Nothing that is not well known to us all," he haughtily replied. "I am your willing assistant, my lord, in serving the cause of the Church; but I will not receive reproof from you. Behold the evidence that I possess the right to give it to you."

As he spoke, he placed before him a paper with heavy wax attached to it, bearing the seal of the Pope upon it. The prelate glanced upon its contents, and bowed respectfully as he replied,

"I seek not to censure a worthy son of the Church, who has served it as faithfully as you have. What fate do you advise shall be awarded in this case?"

"If it may be so, my lord, I would incline to mercy. The accused is young; she may listen to our persuasions, and return to the right path."

"Prisoner, do you hear that our brother intercedes for you? What have you to say in furtherance of his wishes?"

Eugenia arose and stood before him:

"I have this to say, my lord, that the priest asks my life that he may make of it a wreck and a desolation. He, the vowed minister of God, has asked of me to become his wife, when he knows that, however pure the tie may be in the sight of Heaven, among men it is not recognized as legal or binding, and it is in direct violation of the vows he has taken. My lord, it was his loathsome words of love that opened my eyes to the condition of the house I was about to enter. Once its vowed slave, and I should have been completely in his power; therefore I recoiled at the risk of life itself."

"And life you have surely sacrificed," said the abbot, before the bishop could respond. "I resign you to your fate; let it be severe as the Church awards."

The third monk, who had hitherto remained silent, now spoke :

"The prisoner must be strongly tainted with heresy, or she would not have dared to act so irreverently beside the sacred altar of God. The accusation she brings against our holy brother in the faith, Antoine de Chalus, is another proof of her contumacy ; and she has rendered herself liable to severe punishment on that score alone. I insist that the extreme penalty provided in such cases be awarded."

"Well and wisely spoken," replied the bishop. "Have you aught to say to the charge of heresy, prisoner?"

Eugenia clasped her hands in anguish, and her voice had in it an expression that must have moved any heart but that of an inquisitor. She said :

"When I came hither, I was one halting between two opinions, and the subtle eloquence of yonder evil man convinced me that the Church to which he belongs is the true one. He taught me to believe that the tales I had been told of its unrighteous abuse of power were chiefly the inventions of her enemies, and I blindly walked into the path he pointed out. Now I know that, for his own purposes, I was fatally deluded. My fortune has gone to swell the coffers of the Church ; my liberty I myself surrendered at his instigation ; and now my life is demanded as the price of the fatal error into which he led me. I yield it. I would sooner perish than live the life he dared to sketch to me yesterday, when he came here to receive my last confession before the veil was to be assumed. I shall not die a nun, and I thank God for saving me from that."

The bishop raised his hand :

"Prisoner, you have been heard. Now listen to my voice while it pronounces your just doom."

He paused, and motioned to the superior who had been present throughout the scene. She threw over the white dress of the young girl a robe of coarse serge, which concealed her whole person. Summoning all her strength,

Eugenia stood erect to hear the terrible fate that awaited her. The bishop proceeded :

"I condemn you, Eugenia Altenberg, convicted of high crimes and misdemeanors against the holy Apostolic Church, to be left alone three days in the Subterranean that lies beyond this hall. A loaf of bread and a pitcher of water shall be placed beside you, and that is to be the only sustenance afforded you during that time by mortal man or woman at the risk of the anathema of the Church, which has condemned you to this punishment. At the close of that period you will be removed to the cell of the condemned, where you will be retained in close confinement during the remainder of your life."

Eugenia grew faint at the appalling prospect before her ; but she struggled to regain her composure, and presently raising her head, she said,

"Even this will be preferable to the life of wretchedness I must have endured with those professing to be the followers of Christ, yet who secretly violate every command of his law. The agony will be sharp, but it will be brief ; for I shall not survive the three days of darkness in that dreadful place. But God will receive his own, though condemned by the iniquitous judgment of man."

The Dominican descended from his seat and unclosed the door leading into the cavern beyond. As the prisoner glanced toward it her frame shivered, and her steps faltered in spite of her courageous words. Father Antoine approached her, and firmly grasped her arm : as she felt his loathsome touch, she recovered her self-control, and walked steadily toward the door by which she firmly believed she passed from life to death. As she reached it, she turned and addressed the superior.

"Adieu ! madame. You can not comprehend that I prefer even the awful doom before me to the life you lead ; but it is certainly true. May God teach you to mend it, is my earnest prayer."

Then, turning to the bishop, she said,

"My lord, in the hour of death, when the long array of innocent lives you have condemned comes up before you, may mine not be the hardest one to bear; and may Heaven not deny to you that mercy you know not how to grant to others."

She then passed out of the judgment hall, the Dominican carrying a lamp before her, which cast its faint rays into the depths of darkness around, while Father Antoine still held her arm and guided her steps. When they had proceeded some distance, he whispered,

"Foolish child! Is death so welcome, that such a doom is preferred to the life and love I offer you? I leave you the three days in which to repent. When starvation has fixed its fangs upon your vitals—when darkness has told its tale of horror to you, I will return, and see what your choice will then be."

Eugenia shuddered, for the fear of his presence was even more terrible than the fate that menaced her. She made no reply, and when they had gained a distance of about two hundred yards from the judgment hall, the three paused. The lamp, with a small pitcher filled with water, and a loaf of bread, were placed upon a fragment of stone, and on one close beside it the exhausted girl sank.

"Adieu! daughter," said the Dominican, hypocritically, "and may Heaven enable you to recognize the justice of your punishment."

The abbot only said, "Remember, and repent;" and the two left her to her fate.

Eugenia raised her head and looked after them, but their forms were soon lost in the gloom. In the distant door a lamp was held as a guide to their steps, and she watched its faint twinkle with a feeling of utter desolation it would be vain to attempt to describe. At length it vanished, and she could not repress the cry that burst from her lips as she felt that she was alone in the wide dark void around her, which was only made more tangible to her senses by the feeble circle of light cast by the lamp they had left her. For a few

moments she was completely unnerved, and she sank prostrate upon the cold stone: its chill struck through her frame, and aroused her to the necessity of reflection.

The words of the priest, the fear of perpetual imprisonment, both acted as a stimulant to her energies. She resolutely arose, resolved to wander away from the spot on which they had left her, and perish in the gloom around, sooner than be again thrown in the power of her ruthless judges. Eugenia lifted the lamp: it could not last many hours, and she must seek some other spot before it expired. Her eye fell on the bread and water: she eagerly drank the limited portion of the latter which had been left, and then, taking the loaf with her, she ventured forward, starting at every step, and almost expecting some fearful form to rise before her and bar her progress.

These nervous terrors gradually left her as the increased difficulties of the pathway occupied her attention. Every instant impediments presented themselves, and, as she overcame them, the thought was uppermost to her that at every step she was removing herself farther away from him she so loathed and feared, and she went on until she became so much exhausted she was compelled to sit down and rest.

Weariness, want of food—for she had scarcely tasted nourishment for twenty-four hours—and sickness of soul, at this crisis, completely overcame her, and Eugenia gradually sunk into a state of partial insensibility. Hours passed away; the lamp was nearly exhausted; yet the poor girl lay still and white upon the earth, with no defined feeling but an acute sense of fear that her light would soon expire, and leave her in that deep darkness to die alone. Then the thought that God is every where came to cheer her desolation, and she prayed for help, if it might be; for resignation, if she must die.

In the mean time, two figures, each one carrying a lighted torch, came slowly through the tortuous avenue leading into this dreary place; and on the face of one was an ex-

pression of hope which had not lately been seen there. They reached the outlet above the stream, and Gerauld said,

"If she should not be here, after all! Ah! you can not tell the horror of that thought to me. If I can not rescue her, after that wild appeal to me, my happiness, my life, will become a perfect wreck."

"I'm almost sure she will be here, monsieur; for I know this is the place where they put the condemned to pass through purgatory, as they call it, before they remove them to the cells where they are to pass the rest of their lives."

"That may be mere rumor, Ammonet. We can not believe half that we hear of these secret institutions. How did you find this out?"

"Well, monsieur, the friar who employed me to make the lock was a gossiping fellow, and he told me a great deal. We went together into the place we're coming to, and I saw evidences that people had been left there, not only to do penance, but to die."

Gerauld shuddered at the idea of his fair and delicate Eugenia being left in such a spot to perish; and he scrambled through the aperture above the stream, and cast his light into the blackness beyond. No ray of light shone from the opposite side, and he sprang over the frail bridge, still left standing, with which the dragoons had spanned the stream in their foray upon the fated Huguenots. In his heart was the desperate intention of never leaving the spot unaccompanied by her he came to seek. Ammonet followed him, and when they gained the opposite bank, he lighted a lamp he carried for that purpose, and placed it at that point as a beacon to enable them to retrace their steps. Then they went on their search. They dared not call, lest their presence might be betrayed, and for an hour they wandered to and fro with no result. Despair was fast gaining the mastery in the heart of the excited lover, and Ammonet said, in a desponding tone,

"I'm 'fraid its useless trouble, monsieur; and they've put her in the prison at once."

"Then we must rescue her from that. Can we not find the entrance to the cells?"

"That would be a desperate venture, monsieur, and one I wouldn't like to engage in myself. If we were found out, we both might safely say we would never see the light of day again."

"Why should we be found out?" impatiently asked Lefevre. "I can not leave these vaults and know that Eugenia remains in them. She has no one but me to look to for rescue, and I should be a miserable craven to fail her in her direst need. Leave me, Ammonet, if you choose, but I must proceed until I find her."

"M. Lefevre, this is madness; you will only lose yourself, without—"

"I care not; life is worthless if she is lost, and thus— I must rescue her."

As he thus spoke, they turned an angle which seemed to open into another wide waste of emptiness. A faint luminous point, like the last red gleam from an expiring taper, loomed in the darkness, and Gerauld impetuously continued,

"Here! there is a beacon of hope at last. Follow me, Ammonet, for she we seek is on that spot."

Keeping his eyes fixed upon the gleaming point, and regardless of every impediment, Gerauld made his way to the place on which lay the senseless form of her he so eagerly sought. The lamp was expiring, and the burning wick had, at the most critical moment, guided them to her side. In her wanderings she had left the main cavern, and the nook in which she lay completely screened the feeble light from the observation of her two friends, until its last fading glimmer providentially became visible to them.

To snatch the lifeless girl to his breast, and utter the wildest assurances of love and protection, was the first impulse of Lefevre; but no reply came from her pale lips—no gleam of consciousness flitted over those white features, and in anguish he moaned,

"They have destroyed her—terror has deprived her of life. Oh, wretches, accursed wretches! are such the deeds you dare to commit in the name of the merciful Redeemer? Eugenia! my angel, my adored, look up! Speak to me, I conjure you."

"Monsieur, do not give way thus. Let us get her out of this frightful place, and then we can do something to restore her. She is only in a swoon."

As he spoke, Ammonet took the torch the young officer had hitherto carried, and led the way to the distant light which marked their point of egress. To get away from this gloomy place was now the only thought of Gerauld. Swiftly they threaded their steps to the stream, the weight of the slight form he bore scarcely impeding the movements of Lefevre. They crossed the bridge, entered the avenue, which had been so widened by the soldiers that it afforded free passage to the lover with Eugenia in his arms; and they paused not till they reached the throne-room, and securely fastened the door behind them. Then Lefevre looked on the pallid face that lay upon his breast, and with emotions of wild joy saw that consciousness was returning. He gave her wine, which seemed to revive her, and in a few moments she unclosed her eyes. Their wild gaze met that of Lefevre, so full of love and solicitude, that the heavy eyelids drooped over them again as she murmured,

"Are we in heaven, Gerauld? for I could never meet you in any other place, after all that has passed."

He replied, in tones of tenderest affection,

"You are saved, my sweet love! You are in the arms of him who will protect you from all further evil, or die in the attempt. Rouse yourself, my Eugenia; for much remains before us ere our escape is effected."

The consciousness that she was indeed saved—that Gerauld was beside her, seemed to endow Eugenia with new life. She raised herself from his supporting arms and looked around: a shudder thrilled her frame as she said,

"We are still in the cave. We are not yet safe, and

you—you, Gerauld, may fall a victim to your efforts to rescue me."

"Fear not, my angel! we are safe; and so soon as you have strength to do so, we will proceed. A wagon awaits us, to which I will remove you; there you will find your friend Irene awaiting you, and together we will gain the sea-shore. Before another day has passed away, I trust we will be on our way to England."

An expression of joy shone over the expressive face of the young girl. She took his hand, and pressing it fervently to her lips and heart, said,

"Pardon—pardon, generous, noble heart, that I ever for one moment believed any fate preferable to becoming yours. Oh, Gerauld! I have been fearfully punished. But let us lose no time. I am strong—"

She arose, and would have gone on alone, but Gerauld passed his arm around her and sustained her faltering steps. Ammonet led the way with the torches, and after several pauses, that Eugenia might rest, they reached the outlet.

Lefevre saw by the position of the stars, and the height to which the moon had risen, that it was late in the night. When they came to the edge of the precipice, he again lifted Eugenia in his arms, and said,

"Now close your eyes, Eugenia, and I will bear you safely over the narrow pathway before us."

Implicitly relying on his judgment, and happy to feel herself under his protection, she obeyed him; and with a heart beating with joyful thankfulness, Lefevre carried her in his strong arms over the dangerous ledge.

The horse of Ammonet was concealed in the ravine awaiting his master, who was to accompany the wagon as an escort; and Eugenia was placed on it. The two young men walked on either side, and in silence they pursued the road to the Eagle Pass. Fortunately they encountered no one on the route, and gained the rendezvous in safety.

Delmont and Irene were already there, and we pass over the joyful surprise of the latter at meeting the friend she

had believed lost to her forever. Room for another fugitive was found in the wagon, and after receiving the heartfelt adieux of Delmont, they set out on their dangerous journey. Twice on the road to the sea they were in imminent danger of detection, and consequent arrest; but the tact of Ammonet averted the calamity; and at twilight of the following day they reached a retired cove, in which lay a small vessel that had been hovering around that portion of the coast several days awaiting their appearance.

The brig was already crowded with refugees, and, as the party of Lefevre was the last one expected, she immediately prepared to set sail. Many were the thanks lavished on the shrewd and kind-hearted dragoon by those he had so faithfully served; and at the moment of parting Irene drew from her finger a ring she had long worn, and insisted on his accepting it as a token of remembrance from one who deeply regretted her inability to reward his services in a more suitable manner.

He replied, with the gallantry of his race,

"This, mademoiselle, is more precious to me than lands or gold, for it has been worn by you. I will bear it next my heart to my dying day."

CHAPTER XXX.

Two years have passed since the close of our last chapter, and in a small cottage in the outskirts of London our refugees are still to be found. They tarried there, hoping, from week to week, to hear something from the father whose uncertain fate was a source of deep and wearing anxiety to them. Since the destruction of the valley church, M. Lefevre had never been heard from. His son had written letters to every point at which Huguenots were received in Europe, and had twice visited Holland himself, in the hope that some clew might be found which could reunite them.

The pastors of the desert, who still, in spite of persecutions, visited their native land, and followed their vocation by stealth, made such efforts as were possible to trace him, but entirely without success. In that time, vessels from the colony of Virginia had arrived in England, and no such refugee could be heard from there.

Lefevre had collected quite a party of emigrants around him, and, chiefly through his efforts, a grant of land had been made to them on the banks of the James River by the King of England. As the time for their departure drew near, his solicitude concerning the fate of his father became painful in the extreme; but we will enter with him in his cottage home.

Eugenia, now his wife, is the happy mistress of that home; but a cloud passes over her sunny face as her eye falls on the sable dress of Irene; for, alas! as the crown to all her bitter trials, Irene is a widowed bride.

The ship on which Chastain had embarked was wrecked soon after reaching the Atlantic, and no one escaped to tell her sad fate, Fragments of the vessel had been picked up

with her name upon them, which afforded the only clew to her loss—and thus had that living mass of misery been buried in the depths of the sea, as had been foreseen by those who sentenced them to such a doom. Irene grieved as only women of deep and high-toned feeling can grieve. It was a life-sorrow to her, to which her strong religious faith brought the only consolation she could now receive.

Gerauld came in, looking weary and disappointed. Eugenia drew near him, and smoothed the dark hair from his brow as she asked,

“What annoys you, dear Gerauld? Of late you seem so troubled, that I am unhappy about you.”

“Petite, ’tis only the same cause of uneasiness pressing more nearly on me. The time draws near when we *must* leave this country for our new home, and my poor old father is still a wanderer where his children may never meet him again.”

Eugenia sighed, and Irene drew near them:

“Ah! if we could only hear from him; only be reunited with him, I should feel almost happy once again,” she said.

A rap came to the door, and a refugee, like themselves, handed in a sealed package addressed to Lefevre. He said, by way of explanation,

“Another family reached here from Languedoc to-day; and they brought this for you.”

Lefevre thanked him, and his countryman retired. On opening the package, it proved to be from Captain Delmont, and contained two inclosures: one was to Irene, offering her his hand again, and declaring that his affection was unabated; the other was to Lefevre, and contained the last written confession of the Sieur de Montour, dictated to Delmont from the bed of death. In it he relented so far as to inform his nephew that under No. 51 he would find his father, in one of the galleys at Marseilles; and he could take such steps as would lead to his release.

“Two years’ service in the galleys! Oh, my God! can

he have lived through them!" exclaimed the son, with pale cheeks and quivering lips, while his two companions burst into tears and wept bitterly. After a silence of deep emotion, Gerauld said,

"Eugenia, see that a change of clothing is packed for me. I must set out for Marseilles to-morrow."

"Right, my dearest Gerauld. Lose no time in seeking our father; but how will you be able to regain his liberty without incurring great danger yourself?"

"I still have the pardon granted him by the king two years since, and that will suffice to rescue him even now. With the assistance of Delmont and a good disguise, I can manage it without much danger to myself. So, sweet wife, do not fear for me while I am gone. God will protect the son who goes on so holy an errand as this. I will write to Delmont to-night, and he will receive my letter before the sailing vessel I must go in can reach France."

After regaining sufficient composure, Irene also wrote to Delmont. She thanked him for his constant affection, but declared her unalterable intention to remain the widow of Chastain; for the affection which had matured with her life could never permit a rival in her heart to him who had so sadly perished.

On a chilly day toward the close of winter, an officer in the uniform of the French service came, by permission, on board of a galley lying in the harbor at Marseilles. The vessel was of strange construction, and deserves a description. It was about a hundred and fifty feet in length, with a long case of boards running from stem to stern, to protect the hold from the waves that washed over the deck when the boat was heavily laden. On each side of this frame were placed the benches for the rowers, one end of which was made fast to it. The seats were but half a foot in width, and were covered with sack-cloth stuffed with flock. Over these benches a cowhide was thrown that reached to the feet of the occupants, and afforded an imperfect protec-

tion from the waves that constantly poured over the deck when the boat was in motion.

To these wretched seats the galley-slaves were chained, six to each one, with an oar in front of them fifty feet in length, which they were required to keep in constant and regular motion, under peril of the lash or the bastinado. Among murderers, thieves, and blasphemers, punished for their crimes against society, were to be found hundreds of Huguenots, condemned to this terrible existence for adherence to their religious principles; and toward them the discipline was even more severe than in the case of the malefactors.

The captain of the galley, a coarse, brutal-looking man, came forward to receive the visitor.

"Is it curiosity or business which brings you here?" he bluntly asked.

"Business," briefly responded Captain Delmont. "I wish to see No. 51, if you please."

"Fifty-one? Let me see; that is the Huguenot preacher. He fainted at his work yesterday, and if it occurred again, I ordered him to be thrown into the sea. I don't know whether it was done or not; I will see."

Inexpressibly revolted by this cold-blooded brutality, Delmont followed him about half the length of the vessel, and they paused opposite a bench to which five athletic men were chained; the sixth one was a gray-haired, wasted form, that seemed scarcely able to sustain himself upon his seat.

"There is No. 51, and a miserable devil he is," said the captain. "Hardly life enough in him to be worth claiming, if that is your business here."

Delmont was inexpressibly shocked at the wretched condition of his old friend, who looked toward him with dim eyes, and a mind so dulled by suffering that he did not recognize him. He said,

"I came hither with the pardon of the king for this man, and I require him to be delivered to me without delay. Here is the order for his release."

The captain glanced over the paper he produced, and carelessly said,

"I'm sure you are quite welcome to him; he would have died in a few more days, and there are plenty of Huguenots to put in his place."

The feeble, broken-down man was released, but long confinement to one position had rendered him nearly incapable of walking. Captain Delmont almost bore him in his arms to the carriage he had in waiting, and conveyed him to comfortable but obscure lodgings, where his son anxiously awaited his appearance. M. Lefevre was too much exhausted to recognize even one so dear to him, and he was placed at once in bed, and every attention lavished on him that could restore health of body and mind.

The pardon of the king under his own hand had not been disputed an instant, and the rescue of the prisoner had been promptly effected. After a long sleep, he awoke once more to recognize the face of his son, and gradually his perceptions seemed to return.

A few days of detention were inevitable to recruit M. Lefevre's wasted frame before undertaking a sea-voyage; but at length they were able to embark. The perfect rest he enjoyed, the presence of his beloved son, and the prospect of soon meeting his daughter, acted like magic on the depressed old man. Life and energy were revived within him; and when they landed in England, Irene was less shocked than she had expected to be by the change she beheld in him.

The remainder of the winter was spent in preparations for the voyage to the New World, and with the opening spring the party of exiles, consisting of more than a hundred refugees, set out for the colony of Virginia.

CONCLUSION.

On a bright day in June, in the year 1687, the vessel bearing this little band of conscientious men and women cast anchor opposite Jamestown. Her deck was crowded with groups looking with earnest and longing eyes upon the land of promise they had so long desired to behold.

Among them sat a venerable and serene looking patriarch, surrounded by his children. Gerauld stood in front of him, while on either side sat Irene and Eugenia, holding his hands clasped in theirs. As the ship swung around toward the land, the white-haired pastor arose and said, in a loud, clear voice,

"The Lord has brought us out of all our troubles; let us return thanks to his holy name."

Every knee was reverently bowed, and M. Lefevre uttered a brief and deeply touching prayer; then a hymn of thanksgiving arose impulsively from the grateful hearts that at length had found a haven of rest from persecution.

At that day the arrival of a ship was an event, and every soul in the village hurried down to the landing to offer the new-comers the greeting of friendship and peace. Gerauld clasped the hand of his wife, and said,

"Here we will make a new home, my beloved, in which peace, truth, and the pure love of the All Father shall dwell."

"In its shelter I shall find a true life," she replied, with moistened eyes. "Oh, my husband! to you I owe every thing; and hand-in-hand will we go on the journey before us, seeking to know the will of Heaven, and, as far as may be, performing it."

The father clasped his daughter to his heart, and both felt how different for her would have been the future had

Chastain been with them. Irene repressed the tears that sprang to her eyes as she said,

"I am very happy, father, in having you restored to me. The goodness of God was so signally shown in that, that I dare not repine."

She raised her fair face, with an expression of angelic calm upon it. The wind swept back the folds of her black veil, revealing its delicate beauty to those upon the shore, and a cry of joy came from the heart of one who stood ready to spring upon the deck so soon as the landing was effected.

"Does joy ever kill?" he asked himself; "for I can not pause to prepare her for a meeting now."

The ship touched the strand: he bounded upon the deck, the next moment reached the side of Irene, and, clasping her in his arms, exclaimed,

"Mine—mine at last! Oh, Irene! best-loved, long-expected, I have not trusted and watched in vain!" And Irene awoke from a momentary faintness to know that Chastain himself held her in his arms.

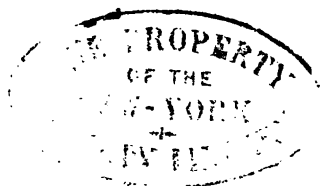
The explanation was soon given. Finding the ship must inevitably be lost, Claude lashed himself to a piece of the wreck: he had been picked up in an insensible state by a vessel bound to New Amsterdam, and such care taken of him as restored him to health. After many difficulties and delays, he had succeeded in making his way to Virginia during the past winter.

In the confident expectation of their arrival, he had already prepared an humble home for their reception, and thither the whole party proceeded at once. A portion of land had been allotted to him, which he planted and cultivated himself, and the fruits of the earth already began to reward his industry abundantly. Beneath the shelter of a patriarchal group of trees a rustic cottage, covered with wild vines, which Chastain had transplanted from the neighboring woods, reared its front; and now all his care in decorating her home in the New World was rewarded by the tender smile and sweet thanks of his beloved Irene.

The grant of land belonging to the new settlers was higher up James River, and to it they removed during the summer. The first house erected was for the worship of God, and the people lived in tents while its construction went on. M. Lefevre was installed as its pastor; and there, surrounded by his children and grand-children, he lived to extreme old age, happy in beholding the union and prosperity that existed among this little band of pilgrims, who took for their motto, "God and our adopted country," and disseminated far and wide the truths for which they had so severely suffered.

Many years after the enactment of the foregoing scenes, the abbot met the fate his cruelties merited. After the escape of Eugenia, he preferred remaining in Languedoc, where he could aid in extirpating the heretics, and his proceedings are matter of history. Promoted to a high rank in the Church, his evil power was thereby extended, and scarcely a family belonging to the Huguenots escaped without a deadly injury from him to some one of its members. The spirit of the Reformers was at length aroused to rebellion by Jean Cavalier, who led the Camisard war. In one of his forays Antoine de Chalus was made prisoner: he was bound, and each man among his troops who had cause of complaint against him was permitted to come forward and give him a blow in commemoration of it. Scores of stern faces and burning hearts stepped from the ranks, and as each blow was dealt the giver cried out the crime it expiated.

At the same time, the prelate's constant attendant, Ferron, was captured, and stabbed to the heart by a brother of one of the victims immolated in the cave through his base treachery.



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87
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